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The earth image of Thomas Hardy

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THE EARTH IMAGE OF THOMAS HARDY

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by

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FOR LIFE I HAD NEVER CARED GREATLY

For Life I had never cared greatly,
As worth a man's while;
Peradventures unsought,
Peradventures that finished in nought,
Had kept me from youth and through manhood till lately
Unwon by its style.

In earliest years--why I know not--
I viewed it askance;
Conditions of doubt,
Conditions that leaked slowly out,
May haply have bent me to stand and to show not
Much zest for its dance.

With symphonies soft and sweet colour
It courted me then,
Till evasions seemed wrong,
Till evasions gave in to its song,
And I warmed, until living aloofly loomed duller
Than life among men.

Anew I found nought to set eyes on,
When, lifting its hand,
It uncloaked a star,
Uncloaked it from fog-damps afar,
And showed its beams burning from pole to horizon
As bright as a brand.

And so, the rough highway forgetting,
I pace hill and dale
Regarding the sky,
Regarding the vision on high,
And thus re-illumed have no humour for letting
My pilgrimage fail.

-Thomas Hardy

INTRODUCTION

In the world of Thomas Hardy the individual who finds himself caring greatly for life is the same individual who must suffer the delusion of having his pilgrimage fail. In the conclusion of the short poem "For Life I Had Never Cared Greatly" the poet-novelist implies that, in spite of his better judgment and knowing that he is destined for misfortune, he cannot help becoming involved in living. Even though men are usually doomed to suffering, it is the ignoble life that does not make the effort to live; it is the heroic life that attempts in vain a worthwhile ambition.

The literary world readily accepts that Thomas Hardy is pessimistic about man's life and destiny, the equity of the world in which man lives, and the sympathy of the universe which gives him birth and sustains his life. However, critical study of the degree of pessimism in various Hardy novels probably does not deserve attention since several critics have covered the topic adequately and little can be added by an amateur. Briefly, the point is that the fifteen novels ranging from Desperate Remedies to Jude the Obscure (discounting The Well-Beloved which, though it was published after Jude had been written earlier) become increasingly and obviously less hopeful about the possibility of attaining human happiness. In Hardy's first novel the heroine

after much heartache and unmerited suffering marries the man who has faithfully loved her and gallantly saved her. In Jude the Obscure all the hero's children die, his wife leaves him on his deathbed while she pursues her usual animal pleasures, his mistress returns in masochistic penance to a husband she despises, and Jude dies alone and despairing, knowing (as his creator undoubtedly does) that there is no hope in God or orthodox religion, in human society or in human love. These two examples from extreme ends of the novel canon indicate that even a superficial reading of Hardy fiction presents the increased rejection of Christian hope, either for this life or any other, and its replacement with gloomy despair.

Closely similar to the obvious term "pessimism" is the more literary word naturalism. Naturalism implies that not only is life in this world a painful existence, but also that individual man cannot of his own volition make the choice to improve the quality of his life. Man in his attempts to alter his fate or his world is thwarted by a deluge of natural conditions that prevent his progress. Hardy's particular brand of naturalism does not appear at first contact to be a clinical inspection, but on careful study it is observed to surround the actors of fiction with a drama of cosmic elements that determine their destiny. Hardy's cry against the unfairness of the universe takes form in his many trapped fictional heroes and heroines who cannot control the direction of their lives but who are even in tragedy noble in their efforts to do so.

The subject of this particular critical inquiry is to study

the attitudes and beliefs of the author, and to examine critically the images from the natural world that portray these beliefs. A critic who is aware of the "intentional fallacy" will also be aware that the implications of a writer's symbolic material and the varieties of meaning derived from his works may be either a conscious or an unconscious choice on his part. Since this proposes to be a critical study, the method will be to interpret Hardy's naturalism in the major fiction and to study the appropriateness and quality of the natural symbols that delineate the naturalistic theme.

Since the major concern of this thesis is a progressive study of the novelist's change of thought as reflected in symbol, the organization will be chronological. The five major novels that incorporate the earth image as symbol will be included; Jude the Obscure, which culminates the philosophy of doubt, will be considered only in the Conclusion, not because of its lack of relevance to the author's philosophy, but because its pattern of imagery is not from the natural world. Unfortunately, Thomas Hardy wrote several novels that ought to be forgotten--and the novelist on the basis of his finer works to be forgiven. Of these more negligible works only the two that contribute to the novelist's developing pattern of nature symbolism will be considered.

A Pair of Blue Eyes, the second Hardy novel and first for consideration, is frequently melodramatic in tone and contrived in effect, but it is important in that it is the first Hardy novel to use the image of the great Earth-mother that later becomes of great importance in both Hardy's fiction and his verse. In

Far From the Madding Crowd the earth image is more skillfully handled and less frequently obtrusive; nature is for the first time labelled as Earth-mother. In both early novels the devouring mother resembles the Titan mother Rhea, the primordial child devourer. In both efforts the earth image is drawn as a capricious personality who dispenses her blessings and her wrath when and on whomever she wishes.

Although the earth scene is supposedly cosmic in scope and the earth personality cruelly unpredictable in the early novels, the effect falls short because the image is so obviously contrived. The Return of the Native sees, however, the origin of a statement of truly cosmic proportions. Though it has shortcomings as tragedy, the novel makes a meaningful, cohesive statement about man's universal predicament, his inability to escape his fate, his minute importance on the scale of things and his lack of choice in shaping his destiny. The heroine's "Prince of the World" is like the earth mother of earlier fiction in that this personality also awards punishment instead of favor. The major difference is that now everyone suffers; the degree of pessimism and naturalism is advanced and solidified; and the symbolic elements of nature join in the lament. This cohesiveness is the basis of the superiority in imagery of The Return of the Native.

Two on a Tower, the second of the minor novels to be included in this study, attempts to carry a similar theme incorporating the symbol of the stellar universe to dramatize man's comparative insignificance (as Egdon Heath had done symbolically in The Return). This minor novel also employs the winter metaphor for sterility

and death, important for consideration because the seasonal cycle figures prominently in later novels, particularly The Woodlanders and Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

The climax of Hardy's powers as novelist comes with The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders and Tess of the D'Urbervilles, outstanding because of their integration of theme and symbol. The Mayor presents a changing trend; nature as a personality is not a prominent force. Rather, the river is a symbol of Henchard's destiny (and the destiny of all men) and the circular patterns of nature parallel the patterns of time, of chance and of fate. In this novel of a human action of consequence all forces--not just the wrath of nature alone--are directed against the tragic protagonist.

Transition becomes even more obvious in The Woodlanders. Here nature does not inflict suffering upon man; she suffers mutually with him at the hands of a greater, more malignant force. More than Egdon Heath or Casterbridge environs, Hintock Woods groans, mourns and suffers with the changing seasons. The elements and the creatures of nature mirror, parallel and symbolize human suffering. The earth has become, instead of a devouring mother, a sacrificial mother like the primeval earth mother whose dismembered body gave birth to new life in Mesopotamian myth.

In Tess of the D'Urbervilles Hardy develops and improves the same types of earth images that he has employed previously. The seasons of the year present the cycle of life and death; images of fertility and barrenness symbolize loving and hating or living and dying; phallic likenesses in nature remind Tess of her guilt

and sin; Stonehenge dramatizes the supreme sacrifical atonement that must be made for the sin of living. It is because of the satisfying unity of theme, myth and symbol (and because one cannot help loving Tess), that Tess of the D'Urbervilles is Hardy's most artistic novel and a fitting climax in a study of his art.

Finally, the meliorism of Hardy deserves attention. Though it is not a part of naturalism, it is a part of Thomas Hardy. Though hope may be hardly perceivable, Eustacia and Henchard and Tess leave something behind. This study will attempt to decide, by either literal treatment or symbolic description, what hope is left and how valuable that hope is. In the previously cited poem Hardy claims, "for life I had never cared greatly," but he also admits that he has a high vision and that it is inevitably painful to see his pilgrimage fail. In Hardy's fiction pilgrimages repeatedly fail, but the characters contribute to the universal drama of man because they have tried.

THE SEEDS OF NATURALISM

A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

That Thomas Hardy subscribed to a naturalistic philosophy of life is hardly a contention that can be conclusively proven on the basis of his early fiction; however, the early novels show both symbolically and thematically the seeds of doubt that were destined to culminate in a harvest of cosmic naturalism in the great novels of the last phase. A Pair of Blue Eyes, published in 1873, was young Thomas Hardy's third attempt at universal expression in the novel genre. It had been preceded by Desperate Remedies, a fast-paced and intricately plotted melodrama, and the acclaimed Under the Greenwood Tree, a comic pastoral romance whose chief artistic contribution is the creation of the breed since come to be known as the Wessex rustics. Though the first novel has been lamented and the second lauded, critics have had little to say about Blue Eyes other than commenting on the obviously autobiographical young architect who meets his future love while in the process of renovating a church or condemning Hardy's melodramatic climax of the grand spectacle on the cliff. But A Pair of Blue Eyes has much to offer the student of Hardy. Flawed though it certainly is, it has three points to recommend its careful perusal: its foreshadowing in plot structure Tess of the D'Urbervilles, its introduction of the pervading Hardyan mood atmosphere,

and its wealth of natural symbol used--sometimes clumsily, at other times almost brilliantly--to develop the theme of the novel.

The triangular plot structure of Blue Eyes anticipates Tess in that the love of Elfride for Knight is an aenemic version of Tess's love for Angel Clare. In both the woman does not feel herself his equal, Elfride mentally; Tess mentally, morally or spiritually. Each prefers being the slave of a greater man to existing as the queen (Elfride) or indulged mistress (Tess) of a lesser one. Both humble themselves before unbending, self-righteous, hypocritical men of lesser stature than they. Both keep their initial love secret, then quietly allow the second man to accept the most sordid interpretation of the past. And finally, both die separated from those who "love" them, Tess on the gallows and Elfride as the wife of a rich man who can provide her only comfort and friendship, not love, until it is too late. The deaths of both heroines prompts some union or reunion, the so-called meliorism of the joined hands of Clare and Liza Lu and the renewed comradeship of Elfride's two lovers. It is readily admitted that there is no similarity between Elfride's timid Stephen and the bold, Satanic Alec and that Elfride, capricious and delightful though she is, is incapable of the depth, the magnitide, the simple beauty that is the soul of Tess. The pompous and intellectual Knight clearly foreshadows Angel Clare, and there is abundant evidence that Hardy had in this early work hit upon a successful plot.

Readers of the later works of Thomas Hardy, those great novels known for their "pessimism" and their "philosophy of doubt," would perhaps be surprised to learn that the foundation of this doubt can

be traced back to his earliest novels in which the tone and philosophy, though not so bitter, nevertheless expresses a serious doubt as to this being the best of all possible worlds and man's being cognizant of the world's meaning. "A just conception of life is too large a thing to grasp during the short interval of passing through it,"[1] Hardy causes Knight to somberly declare in tones that could be Clym Yeobright's, Jude Fawley's or, if less eloquently expressed, even Michael Henchard's. Also in this novel there is Elfride's system of being "content to build happiness on any accidental basis that may lie near at hand . . ." (p. 68) as compared with Knight's method of "making a world to suit /his/ happiness." Elfride's patient acceptance of fate is typical of other Hardy men and women to follow: Thomasin, Elizabeth-Jane, Grace Melbury, Gabriel Oak and Giles Winterborne. Knight's type is found again in Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond, Eustacia and Wildeve, Jude and for a while, Sue, Diggory Venn, Mike Henchard, Bathsheba Everdene--a whole host of characters who rightly or wrongly come to grips with their environment, try manually to twist and shape the forces of destiny.

Hardy is to echo this same philosophy of the two types of people in almost the exact words in The Return of the Native: those " . . . ever content to build their lives on any accidental position that offers itself" and men who "would fain make a globe to suit them."[2] So it is too in the natural world. There are

[1]Thomas Hardy, A Pair of Blue Eyes (New York, 1895), p. 218.

[2]Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (New York, 1969), p. 162.

forces active and passive, givers and takers, parasites and producers. And every form of life is either one or the other because already as early as 1873 Hardy's characters have learned that "strange conjunctions of circumstances, particularly those of a trivial everyday kind, are so frequent that we grow used to their unaccountableness" (p. 78) and that humans must either bow to these circumstances or be broken in an attempt to withstand them. Such too is the very nature of things.

The interest of this study is the "earth image" of Hardy's fiction and the natural symbolism in A Pair of Blue Eyes is just that--an image of the earth as a personality, a not-very-benign parent to its offspring, man. This earth image appears in the feminine gender, Mother nature. When Stephen approaches the area of Cornwall where he ultimately meets and loves Elfride, the crags and valley of the landscape are described as a bosom. The famous scene in which Knight hangs precariously from the Cliff Without a Name and Elfride saves his life personifies this earth creature again: the hill's backbone and marrow are described; Knight clutches the haggard cliff of the ugly face. This scene has been often criticized and justly so in that the author tries to attach cosmic importance to Knight's precarious fate--with such phrases as "time closed up like a fan before him" or comparing Knight's pride--in a very long and labored allusion--to that of Macbeth, leaving the impotent hero hanging literally by one hand while the author pauses and expounds philosophically on the scene. The symbolic strength of the scene is that Knight, who is intellectually proud, is sexually incapacitated in dealing with his emotions about Elfride.

Considering the anatomical implications of the term cliff and the fact that Elfride saves Knight with a rope fashioned of her petticoats strengthens the symbolic statement of Elfride's sexual superiority--as well as moral superiority--to the man in whom she has naively vested such god-like powers.

In further speaking of nature's moods Hardy shows her "feline fun" in her pleasurable tricks of swallowing her victim. "She is read as a person with a curious temper; as one who does not scatter kindness and cruelties impartially and in order but heartless severities or overwhelming generosities in lawless caprice." (p. 254) Here Nature is not fellow-sufferer with man; she is the predator and he the victim.

But the major symbol of the earth-personality is (appropriately to the theme) within her bowels, the grave. As one critic aptly puts it, the earth is "man's womb and his tomb."[3] The Luxelian family vault is described twice in the novel--upon the burial of the first Lady Luxelian and the closing scene of the burial of Elfride, the successor to that title. In both instances the grave is so symbolized: "overhead the groins and concavities of the arches curved" (p. 297) and "under the low-groined arches they had beheld once before." (p. 453) The grave is ultimately Mother Earth's method of consuming her victim. And death is also Hardy's ultimate concern in the novel.

Earlier in the novel Jane Smith, Stephen's mother, had remarked on an unwanted flower in her garden, "I don't care for things that neglect won't kill." It is the fate of Elfride Swancourt to die

[3]Derek Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York, 1954), p. 361.

from neglect. One wonders whether the higher powers feel any pity for her fate. Her gentle-hearted creator cares, and, for all the sentamentilizing and sensationalism, the reader cares too. But the feeling is one that later comes to be associated with Thomas Hardy. The earth goes on, the sea as blue, the cliffs of Cornwall just as menacing as before. This is just the beginning of a very long and very sincere cry of the author that human life just doesn't matter.

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;
Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

-Thomas Gray
"Elegy Wrote in a Country Church Yard"

Thomas Hardy's fourth novel, following closely upon the heels of A Pair of Blue Eyes, was published in 1874 with the frontispiece bearing the famous title taken from Gray's Elegy. Modern critics rate Far From the Madding Crowd as one of Hardy's finest works, best of his earlier efforts. The title is itself interesting and telling. It prepares the reader for something of a pastoral idyll on the order of Under the Greenwood Tree. Hardy lends weight to such an impression in such phrases as, "God was palpably present in the country, and the devil had gone with the world to town."[4] The picture is reinforced with such Arcadian descriptions as Shepherd Oak playing his flute and the amoral country ineptness of the Wessex peasantry on a par with those in Greenwood Tree and absent from the more serious handling of A Pair of Blue Eyes. It appears that the novelist is advancing by one step in this novel by blending a pastoral idyll with a serious theme of man's mortality and the inevitability of his suffering.

The heroine, Bathsheba Everdene, is a somewhat modernized

[4]Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd (New York and London, 1918), p. 163.

and independent version of Elfride Swancourt. Her acrobatics astride her horse mirror the similar capers of the girl-woman Elfride; her coquettish encouragement of the unloved Gabriel is the same feminine wile practiced on Stephen by Elfride. Bathsheba's superiority comes through the added strength, resilence and moral fiber the author has vested within her. Like her Biblical namesake, Bathsheba is the embodiment of loveliness and vanity. Both Hardy feminine creations are the vain and fickle type that lead their lovers to such caustic statements as, "It is as hard to be the earliest in a woman's heart as it is to be first in the pool of Bethesda."

Adding to the heroine a somewhat complicated trio of suitors and developing the ensuing mix-ups becomes the author's formula for the novel's plot. Not only are the names symbolic of the character or temperament (Oak, Boldwood, Gabriel, Troy), but the scene of nature which serves as a backdrop for the introduction of each is a rich source of symbolic information.[5] First is the honest and industrious Gabriel Oak who sets out to prove the adage that "all things come to him who waits" though, as it turns out, he must wait for second-hand happiness. Oak is presented standing on Norcombe Hill at night playing his flute. The chalky structure of the hill is in a "shape approaching the indestructible," reminding one of the permanence of the Cliff Without a Name, or Egdon Heath or Hintock Woods or any one of a number of Hardy's descriptions of a natural scene, homely, rugged, timeless and immutable. Rugged, homely and indestructible too is Shepherd Oak. The stars

[5]Howard Babb, "Setting and Theme in Far From the Madding Crowd," English Literary History, XXX (June 1963), p. 150.

overhead remind Oak that his is such "a tiny human frame" in comparison to the glory of the stellar universe. Gabriel has learned this lesson well; he can be ranked almost with Job on the basis of his patience and humility in adversity. Yet the hill proves treacherous to Gabriel who, though he knows and understands nature (he ponders about the "speaking loneliness" of the hill) is destined to be robbed by nature through no fault of his own. At this point the grotesque picture of the pool beside the hill is "like a dead man's eye" reminding Gabriel of his dead flock and his dead hope. In other scenes of the novel Gabriel proves that he is more attuned to nature than any other character. It is not just that Shepherd Oak lives in harmony with the natural world. (Sometimes in order to prosper in an agricultural world one must fight against nature--as Gabriel is reminded time and again.) It is instead that Oak has a healthy respect for nature and her fickle habits. As critic Roy Morrell claims, if Darwin taught Hardy nothing else, he taught the truth that in nature the pessimists survive--those plants and animals that expect the worst contingency and prepare themselves accordingly.[6] Oak, from practical experience, is such a man. So too, is Hardy who later wrote, "If a way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst."[7]

Sargeant Francis Troy is just the direct opposite of Shepherd Oak in every way, which is the precise reason he wins from Bathsheba the favors denied the longsuffering Oak. The red of Troy's

[6]Roy Morrell, "Hardy in the Tropics: Some Implications of Hardy's Attitude Toward Nature," Review of English Literature, III (January 1962), p. 13.

[7]Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (Lawrence, Kansas, 1966), p. 52.

military uniform, like the red of Bathsheba's jacket, signifies that they are in some respects similar in nature. Both are dashing, spirited, independent, impulsive and sensuous--red qualities all. Troy's introduction is accompanied by snow and darkness with the sergeant protected inside warm barracks while the woman whom he has seduced and deserted is waiting exposed to the cold outside trying to signal him. "It was a night when sorrow may come to the brightest without causing any sense of incongruity." (p. 95) Norcombe Hill, though it is rough and rugged, is also productive and fertile; the snows of winter represent Troy's coldness to Fanny and the death of his passion just as the snows of the next season are to represent coldness and death of love for another woman, Bathsheba Everdene. The symbolic nature of the scene is one of utter sterility.

Troy's subsequent introduction, his first meeting with Bathsheba, is also at night, the setting along a path bordered on both sides by tall firs forming in shape a large hall. Howard Babb points out the repeated symbol of a cavern in connection with Troy.[8] The sword exercise, in which the author himself describes Troy's blade as "promiscuous" as lightning, has open sexual connotations, not only in the Freudian significance of the weapon but also in the deep, fertile hollow in which the exercise is performed. The cavern imagery may be interpreted, on the one hand, as the secret, mysterious nature of Troy or, on the other, the overtly sexual Troy, but probably it represents the synthesis of both.

Troy, who is sensuous, egotistical and deceitful, is not in

[8]Babb, p. 151.

touch with nature, and it is credible that in Hardy's universe the natural world would be unsympathetic with him. On the night of the harvest dinner when he assures the workmen that there will be no rain, rain comes. This is evidence that nature's hostility to one such as Troy, who does not live naturally, parallels her indulgent sympathy for Oak and Bathsheba, allowing them to save the wheat ricks without dangerous personal consequence. The most famous scene of nature versus Troy is the attempt by the penitent soldier to make things right by planting flowers on Fanny's grave. It might be argued that this scene does not reveal nature's cruelty to Troy since, after his departure, Bathsheba comes to replant the flowers and divert the water deluge, thus saving Fanny's grave from further destructive elements of nature. This argument would be valid as far as it goes. While it is true that Fanny's grave has been saved, it is also true that nature has frequently been sympathetic to Fanny as proven by the "weeping" and "dying" of nature upon the occasion of Fanny's death, a very elementary form of the pathetic fallacy. Fanny is, however, now removed from the realm of the living, and it can't matter to her whether the flowers are there or not. The flowers are a symbol of the efficacy of Troy's forgiveness, repentence and retribution, of his peace of mind. And, as far as he ever knows, the cruel elements of fate--and nature--have willed that his attempts be futile.

The imagery of the flameless fire of the sun at dawning of the day on which Boldwood receives the fateful valentine resembles "a sunset as childhood resembles age," a "preternatural inversion of light and shade which attends the prospect when the garish

brightness commonly in the sky is found on the earth and the shades of earth are in the sky." (pp. 114-115) This juxtaposition in nature of things as they are with things as they ought to be mirrors the whole circumstances of Boldwood's behavior in love. For in the early phases of loving, Boldwood is surrounded by the lush and sensuous imagery of the annual rebirth of nature. "The vegetable world begins to move and swell and the saps to rise, till in the completest silence of lone gardens and trackless plantations, where everything seems helpless and still after the bond and slavery of frost, there are bustlings, strainings, united thrusts. . ." (p. 138) In terms later used to describe the budding and germinating love of Tess and Angel Clare, Boldwood is also pictured as seeming in bondage to his cold disposition, but inwardly his emotions are undergoing a new birth. The irony of Boldwood's later situation is paralleled and parodied in the imagery of decay, the most memorable and obvious being the decay of his ricks after the damage of the storm.

Boldwood has an apparent propensity for identifying himself in allusions to those who have wrongly suffered. In the terms of Nathan's rebuke of David for taking Uriah the Hittite's wife, so Boldwood thinks of his Bathsheba as his one precious ewe lamb. ("Why did Troy not leave my treasure alone?") Troy, like King David, has many women at his disposal; Boldwood, like Uriah, possesses not even the one he thinks he has. Later, in blaming God that he has once nearly possessed Bathsheba, then lost her, Boldwood laments, "He prepared a gourd to shade me and like the prophet I thanked Him and was glad. But the next day He prepared a worm

to smite the gourd and wither it." Troy is obviously the worm and Boldwood the prophet. What Boldwood cannot see, in his tormenting self-pity, is clearly presented in the symbolism attached to him. It is he who has "withered" and decayed.

The natural display most often the subject of criticism in Far From the Madding Crowd is the night of the storm. The descriptions of the night's "haggard look," the moon's "metallic look," and the field "sallow with impure light" give way to the lightning's "dancing skeletons" and "undulating snakes" when everything human seems, Hardy says, small and trifling when compared with the infuriated universe. The scene itself has been severely criticized as a plagarized one,[9] but the purpose at this point is not to criticize its source in description. Rather it is of importance to consider the scene's appropriateness as symbol. As in A Pair of Blue Eyes the earth is itself a "Great Mother" (p. 278) chastizing her prodigal offspring. The storm, melodramatic and slightly strained in effect--though more tasteful than the scene on the cliff in the previous novel--is a punishment to Troy and Boldwood. It is relevant to notice that Oak, who lives with and intimately understands the archetypal great earth-mother, receives the warning that passes unnoticed by the sense perceptions of those not so attuned. No Wordsworthian nature worship is this; it is the mere practicality of survival.

At the storm's peak in a seemingly demon-possessed universe, lightning strikes a tree near Gabriel and Bathsheba, leaving half the tree standing and the other half prostrate. Ostensibly the

[9]Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (New York, London, 1965), pp. 90-91.

sudden shock reminds Oak of Bathsheba's danger, but it probably too reminds the near-lovers of the irrevocable manner in which Oak and Bathsheba have been split asunder. (When she is moved to accept him in the end, she is a chastened, matured, sober woman, not her former self, the old Bathsheba being dead.) But the lightning draws them briefly and superficially together; Bathsheba tells him the particular circumstances surrounding her elopement so he can see the matter "in a new light." Analyzed in this view, the storm does have relevance and meaning. It separates symbolically those who comprehend the natural world from those who do not.

Bearing at least as much importance as the storm scene is the night after Fanny's death. In this climactic scene Bathsheba spends the entire night reclined under a tree in the swamp.

> ". . . But the general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth, and in the waters under the earth. The fungi grew in all manner of positions from the rotting leaves and tree stumps, some exhibiting . . . their clammy tops, others their oozing gills. Some . . . red with arterial blood . . . Some . . . leathery and of richest browns . . . The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great." (p. 348)

The description is rich in symbolic and thematic implications. First the pattern is one of a death and rebirth in nature. Bathsheba has just broken with Troy and has almost succumbed to despair, even hatred of the now harmless Fanny. But during the night she has conquered. By the coming of the dawn she has symbolically triumphed over her spiritually poisoned condition. (Even when she returns home and closes herself in the attic to avoid seeing Troy, she shuns such reading material as Maid's Tragedy and Mourning Bride for the more cheerful titles, Love in a Village and Maid of

the Mill.) The description is symbolically satisfying and artistically handled. Bathsheba has witnessed the death of her first love and a rebirth of the indomitable human spirit, the will to live. Actually Bathsheba has nothing to fear in the swamp for its grotesqueness will not harm one such as she; it only "seemed" evil-possessed and a nursery of pestilences.

Considering the almost flowering, the withering, then the rebirth in a new form of Bathsheba's and Gabriel's love, the natural setting on the wedding day is also appropriate. A foggy night has given way to a damp and disagreeable morning; the married pair faces the bleakness of the future as they literally weather the unpleasant morning. It may also remind Gabriel of the mist and fog that separate him from Bathsheba's first love.

A final question for consideration in the novel is the often concluded sentiment that in Hardy country those who live naturally are blessed, and those who are not in tune with nature are doomed to unpleasantness or tragedy. Such an interpretation was previously hinted in that Oak, who understands nature, finally prospers, Troy, who is oblivious to nature, finds it hostile, and Boldwood, who turns his back upon the natural world, finds that the nature-provided prosperity deserts him. But if nature is sympathetic to those who merit her understanding, why isn't she consistent? Why is Fanny left to die alone on a moonless and starless night, then mourned in pathetic fallacy by nature? Why does nature destroy Gabriel Oak's entire flock then provide the means for his renewed prosperity? The answer is that nature is, like the novel's heroine, a fickle creature who beams her pleasure and sheds her wrath on whom she will. And, as Oak learns in dealing with both Bathsheba and the

Earth Mother, those who know nature best can also be best prepared for the dubious favors and sudden devastations she may bestow.

Far From the Madding Crowd employs the earth image in a more skillful manner than does A Pair of Blue Eyes. In the earlier work allusions to natural symbol are usually superimposed on the fabric of the plot, not interwoven into it. In the latter the novelist has tried with more success to integrate plot and symbol, although he is not as successful in this effort as he is in the later novels. Both statements in these early Hardy novels display the earth as maternal parent--capricious, unpredictable and vindictive.

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Persons with even a passing acquaintance with Thomas Hardy are aware that The Return of the Native is tragedy. In this novel, more than any other, the novelist consciously planned to preserve the classical dramatic unities of time and place--limiting the action to a year and a day and the geographical milieu to within a radius of very few miles. He even preserves, almost intact, the Greek chorus in the persons of the Wessex rustics who comment on the action but rarely ever participate in stage center of the drama and the five acts of classical tragedy in the five separate movements toward denouement in the novel. But readers must also be aware that in tragedy there is action on a grand scale, there are heroes of god-like proportions, there is fate, but there are also honor and nobility in facing one's destiny without flinching. And finally there is catharsis. The reader-audience has been vicariously uplifted through suffering; he has learned that there is some purpose and honor in living. It will be the purpose of this chapter to study the novel as tragedy, to realize its theme and philosophy and to focus upon the major natural symbols of the novel--chiefly in the form of the traditional elements of earth, air, fire and water[10]--determining the role they play in the philosophical statement of the author.

[10]Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1964), p. 95.

Upon the shoulders of what persons or forces rests the blame of the tragic resolution of the novel? Are readers led by the novelist-philosopher to believe that the fault is that of Fate, some giant Prince of the World, of man himself, of his society or of nature? It is interesting, even illuminating, to note what the characters themselves have to say on this topic. Eustacia cries out, "O, how hard it is of Heaven to devise such tortures for me, who have done no harm to Heaven at all," (p. 276) or blames, instead of herself, some unseen Prince of the World. (p. 233) Damon laments that his uncontrollably sensuous nature is the fault of Fate and Nature. Clym pleads with Heaven, if Heaven be just, to punish him as the murderer of the two women he loved. But the sufferers may not themselves know Truth. They must of necessity speak from their own prejudices, fears, disappointments and injuries, coloring with their own views the tones of the "universal" picture that Hardy wanted his reading public to perceive. And the study of any world philosophy worth that title must seek diligently after truth.

First and ever present there is nature. The Return of the Native is set on Egdon Heath, the "face upon which Time makes but little impression." Much has been written about Egdon (indeed it has become trite to proclaim that the Heath serves the function of a character in the drama) and consequently about the view of man and the universe as presented in Hardy's classic tragic novel. Richard Carpenter claims that Egdon is, without exception, the most compelling image of the timeless that Hardy ever created.[11] Samuel

[11]Carpenter, p. 191

Chew has written, "Egdon is the type of that Power that moves the world, a Power which is not inimical . . . but indifferent to man."[12] H. C. Webster sees the heath as a dreary and unfertile waste symbolizing the indifference with which nature views the pathetic fate of mankind.[13] On one point most critics of the novel seem to be in agreement: the emotional tone of the heath is one of complete indifference to man's moral and spiritual plight. Such would imply cosmic naturalism. These views are borne out, chiefly in the descriptions of the changelessness of Egdon while human destinies are mangled, human spirits crushed, human lives snuffed out.

Then there is Fate. It is fate that places an ideal goddess (but scarcely an ideal woman) in the path of an idealistic dreamer who is determined to fit the "Queen of the Night" into a day school for heath children. It is mere chance that Clym should return home at the same time that Eustacia's passion for Damon is cooling. It is fate that throws together those to whom the heath is a jail with "demons in every bush and bough" with those who love old Egdon and find it a "nice, wild place to ramble in."

Closely coupled with fate is Hardy's sense of irony, the irony of the cosmos, the pathetic juxtaposition of things as they are with things as they ought to be. It is ironic that those who have the wherewithal to leave the heath have neither the desire nor the ambition to leave Wessex, while those whose hearts are throbbing with hopes of escape have no feasible method of going. It is

[12]Samuel C. Chew, Thomas Hardy, Poet and Novelist (New York, 1964), p. 40.

[13]H. C. Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago, 1947), p. 20.

tragic irony that Eustacia deserts Wildeve for Clym, whom she believes will whisk her off to the gay life in Paris and that Wildeve subsequently inherits the fortune that will take him to Paris after Eustacia's husband has become a furze-cutter on the heath. It is ironic misjudgment that the two who love Egdon are wed to those who despise it, Thomasin to Wildeve, Yeobright to Eustacia. It is cruel irony that Thomasin's child is christened the names of Eustacia and Clym on the very day that their marital union has been ruptured. It is ironic that Damon and Eustacia, who wanted so much from life, are denied happiness, while those who desire very little are rewarded with even less than they desire. The list of ironies could be lengthened but these few dramatic instances prove that fatal irony is in Hardy not the exception, but the rule.

There is the force of society with which the author and the major characters must reckon. In reading The Return of the Native one is forced to admit that the heath society is ignorant, superstitious, prejudiced and generally decadent (though individuals among the rustics are genuinely loveable and memorable). In short, though there be exceptions in the cases of individuals, mankind in general is not beautiful--morally or spiritually. But it is not society that corrupts or condemns in this novel. Eustacia is herself because she wills so to be (or, if this be true naturalism, because she cannot help herself), not because she consciously rebels against the accepted mode. Indeed, she seems oblivious to what society demands until the physical reminder when she is stabbed with Susan Nunsuch's pin. Eustacia is also not destroyed by the

black magic of individuals in society--the melting wax effigy dramatizes and symbolizes Eustacia's death, but it does not cause it. The heath society seems as unaffected by change as the heath itself. Though they are momentarily impressed by the tragic drama being staged in their presence, the common men lack the moral courage to profit from its message. For all Clym's preaching on "morally unimpeachable topics," Hardy knows--and the reader knows--that it will be of no avail. Society neither affects nor is permanently affected by Eustacia's and Clym's destinies.

Finally there is character. Eustacia is the modern Medea of Egdon, comparable to that famous dramatic figure because of her courage, her pride, her insane jealousy and her real or supposed power of sorcery. Clym is unselfish and unambitious, fated to be misunderstood and unappreciated by those whom he most loves and needs. But this earthly man, despite his face being the "countenance of the future," is scarcely a proper mate for an earth goddess. (Consider in this respect his self-pitying plea that Eustacia not go to the dance but remain home to share his misery.) Damon Wildeve is passionate and rebellious as is his Eustacia, but he lacks the fire, the stature, the godlikeness to satisfy for long one such as she. Mrs. Yeobright wants more than anything what is good for her son (and to nourish the Oedipal qualities of his love for her), but she is stubborn and proud--qualities that do not stand her in good stead in dealing with her son and his bride. There is no doubt that these qualities within the characters, when mixed in certain proportions and confronting each other, do lead to people's destruction. Eustacia's love of freedom,

Wildeve's need for sexual possession, Mrs. Yeobright's possessiveness of her only child, Clym's hope to "do some good thing before I die" are, however, not evil qualities. They are natural ones. They are the qualities that nature (or fate) has distributed--in varying degrees--to all human beings. It seems that even individual character, a prime force in the novel, is not left completely to human volition.

In terms of philosophic content, what does all this mean? It means, by logical interpretation, that man's chances for finding happiness are not good. It means that the forces of nature, of society, of fate and even of one's own character conspire against the possibility of earthly fulfillment. There is to be witnessed at this point a philosophic change from Far From the Madding Crowd. In that earlier novel the two characters who most deserve happiness because they have met much personal heartbreak with such stoic acceptance and courage are finally granted the blessing of each other. In The Return of the Native nobody is the winner. Mrs. Yeobright, who had finally come to expect so little (humiliating forgiveness for a wrong that she does not believe to be her fault), receives only lonely death. Clym, who wants to accomplish so much good in the world, is doomed to preach on honoring one's mother and other such precepts that he has lacked the vision to follow. (Those who hear his sermons respond that "it is well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else." p. 315) Eustacia, wanting to be loved to madness, dies alone after rejecting three forms of too-tame love. If Hardy's preferred ending is accepted (though it is not psychologically credible that

the long protective Venn could desert his charge), even Thomasin and Diggory are doomed to loneliness.

This, then, is the philosophy of doubt. The Return of the Native doesn't quite mean that man cannot find happiness or contentment but, all things being considered, he is not likely to. It doesn't mean, in Angel Clare's memorable twist of Robert Brownings words, "God's not in his heaven: all's wrong with the world,"[14] but it does mean that Heaven isn't exerting a great deal of effort on behalf of mankind. It doesn't imply that the forces of the natural world are openly hostile to man (except to those who are hostile to them), but they are supremely indifferent to man's equal curse of existence or death.

To facilitate this expression of his doubt, Hardy incorporates four major sets of symbols in the novel--earth, air, fire and water. On one level these symbols add to the cosmic statement and classical pattern of the novel since these four elements, according to the medieval mind, compose the universe. On another level the imagery is relevant because it is another instance--in addition to time, place and action--in which Hardy preserves the unity of the classics. Yet the most revealing study is of the elements separately since each symbolizes some facet of Hardy's philosophic thought.

The most obvious and most frequently studied image is that of fire. First there is the recurrence of natural fire in the novel, the bonfires of Guy Fawkes' Day that set the inhabitants of the heath apart in an "upper story of the world." But even these physical fires have symbolic overtones. For it is such a fire that

[14]Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles (New York, 1920), p. 324.

twice summons Eustacia's lover to her side, once as the novel opens and later, the night before her death when, in desperation, she plans to elope with Wildeve. On this level the fire represents the sensual passion that draws the two together. Theirs is the "revived embers of an old passion"; Wildeve in describing his desire for Eustacia says, "The curse of inflammability is upon me." (p. 50)

Eustacia is herself connected irrevocably to the fire image, her soul "flame-like" in color and her mouth a "scarlet fire." She speaks of having been a "hot lover" of Wildeve, of preferring "a blaze of love and extinction" to a "lantern glimmer" (p. 56), which must be what she had with Clym who is completely unconnected with this fire imagery. How appropriate to Eustacia's fiery temperament that her destruction should be dramatized by her effigy in wax being melted over Susan Nunsuch's fire, and that Eustacia should that same night meet extinction in the boiling cauldron of the weir.

Besides these two there is, strangely enough, only one other character described in terms of fire, and that is Mrs. Yeobright. Clym fears any mixing of the "inflammible natures" of his wife and mother. (p. 194) Both Mrs. Yeobright and her young daughter-in-law are mentioned at different times as "scalding" their faces with tears. The summer sun has changed the landscape to the scarlet color of fire before the fateful day of Mrs. Yeobright's journey across the heath, and the sun (closely connected throughout the novel to the fire symbol) "stood directly in her face, like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume." (p. 226)

The naturalistic tilting of the scales of justice against mankind is obvious; Mrs. Yeobright, like Eustacia and Damon, is literally consumed by fiery human passions and nature's ready inclination to aid in such self-immolation.

Twice in the novel the importance of fire is proclaimed in terms of a Promethean theme, once as a passing comment of the author when the rustics light fires and later by Clym when he says in anger to his bride, "Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you." (p. 199) But the lamentable fact is that Clym is not capable of such rebellion; he lacks the fire of both the women in his life. And, appropriately enough, the fire imagery reserved for his wife and mother is absent from any references to Clym. Near the end of the novel he proclaims himself an unworthy suitor for his cousin's hand since his passion is all spent, his love for Eustacia having occurred "too far on in his manhood to leave fuel enough on hand for another fire of that sort." (p. 299) Having robbed himself of vision in an Oedipus-like act of expiation, he is content to bring only light, not fire to his fellow mortals.[15] The symbol is clear: Promethean rebels, though grand and beautiful in their one brief flash of heroic glory, are sure to be consumed by that force which nourishes them.

The air symbol is one of stagnation and death, the heath being always surrounded and covered by mist or fog, the wind howling mournfully, the "night sing/ing/ dirges with clenched teeth." (p. 67)

[15]Carpenter, p. 95.

This wind is the "shrivelled voice of the heath" whispering in "dry and papery" tones the ruins of a human song. (p. 58) The air is oppressive and the universe breathless on the still, hot August afternoon when Mrs. Yeobright goes to her death. Eustacia, to whom there are demons in the very air of Egdon, dies on a bitter November night in which the driving rain, pitch blackness and whistling wind are reminiscent of the storms nature brews for Cathy and Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights. (The shrill wind "whistled for joy at finding a night so congenial as this." p. 282) In both cases the funeral tone of the wind and air is appropriate: Mrs. Yeobright dies now passively resolved to accept her lot, and the stormy and passionate heroine is destroyed in a last desperate effort at escape.

It would be pleasant to say that water is a purifying agent, that the sinner can symbolically "wash and be cleansed," or to claim that water has the mythic quality of spiritual rebirth. But in The Return of the Native neither is true. Characters who have undergone a baptism of fire are not likely to be so easily and painlessly cleansed of sin and suffering. Water is a symbol, not of salvation, but of death. Just as surely as the wind moans the funeral dirge of Eustacia and Wildeve, the angry, swirling waters of the weir provide their grave. And, just as irrevocably, Clym dies too in the same grave--his limited passion extinguished and drowned--ready to return to the worshipful adoration of his angelic mother and free of his earth-bound passion of the night goddess Eustacia. Because water is the literal method of dousing a fire, it is aesthetically satisfying that the flames of human passion

be symbolically extinguished by this device.

Hardy's descriptions of water or of the places where water should be found are some of the most grotesque in the novel. Eustacia meets her former lover and quarrels with her mother-in-law on the banks of the pool on her grandfather's estate--the pool that appears on the face of the landscape "like the white of an eye without its pupil." (p. 145) When Clym goes to the Captain's house to help retrieve the bucket from the well (which may symbolize the potential fertility of the womb), Clym looks into the "dank, dark" well and sees "strange humid leaves" and "quaint-natured mosses." (p. 143) Shouldn't this revelation tell Clym something of his chances of a happy, productive love with Eustacia? Mrs. Yeobright finds on that fateful August day that the pools have become "tepid and stringy" and nauseating to the taste, and the smaller ponds are a "vaporous mud amid which the maggoty shapes of innumerable obscene creatures" can be seen. (p. 216) The cosmic nature of the water is like that of the air--either stagnant and dead when symbolizing dead or dying relationships or angry and destructive in justifiable venom against that which, nature concurs, must perish.

To the people whose lots are cast together in The Return of the Native, Egdon Heath represents the earth; indeed, the whole universe. Like the earth mother in Hardy's previous novels, the heath has a timeless quality. It lies sweltering in summer heat, bare and brown in winter winds. Egdon is obviously different things to different people. To Eustacia the heath is a jail, a cold and evil place, a cruel taskmaster. And Eustacia who hates

the heath, is hated and destroyed by it. One critic even goes so far as to use a similar description to that Hardy uses in explaining Tess Durbeyfield's tragedy. "In an ill-conceived world cruel heaven makes sport with her, until, tired with its play, it kills her."[16] Hardy does not go so far. It is simply that Eustacia hates nature and the world nature has created; it is only realistic that nature reciprocate in like manner. Eustacia's or Wildeve's hatreds of the heath, translated into loves, form the attitude of Yeobright, Thomasin or even Diggory Venn, who though he may not love, at least understands and respects old Egdon. Mrs. Yeobright, who has spent her life on the heath, understands nature but feels little sympathy with it, nor it with her. At Blooms-End she has built a fence to keep nature out and herself safe within. For Mrs. Yeobright has been, like Eustacia, born to better things and ambitious of attaining them. The heath--and the fate that shapes the destiny of poor creatures of the universe--does not take kindly to high ambitions.

At times the earth image seems to be one of nature as the sufferer with man. For instance, the clumps of dying furze are scattered about like the "liver and lungs" of some dying beast. The stunted hollies are like "a pupil of a black eye." Egdon too lies the sweltering victim of the merciless sun, the battered victim of storms and winds. Seen in this view the heath is a mirror to man, reflecting his tragic feelings and pathetic sufferings. This is not often the case in The Return, the impression being that Hardy depicts Egdon in such a manner just frequently enough to

[16]Webster, p. 122.

remind man that his destiny and his doom are not the fault of the literal earth but of some power greater--and more malignant--than man or nature.

The heath is, finally, a reminder that man is petty, insignificant, hopelessly small and defenseless. As Mrs. Yeobright looks down upon the colony of laboring ants, the obscene water maggots in the drying pool and the drunken wasps rollicking in the juices of fallen apples from Clym's apple tree, so also the universe looks down upon Clym the furze cutter as a mere brown spot toiling on the face of the heath, Charley appearing on the dark edge of heathland "like a fly on a Negro," or Thomasin going away on her wedding day "a pale-blue spot in a vast field of neutral brown." Man is, to the Force that propels the universe, a mere insect. The vastness, the timelessness, the changelessness of the heath symbolize and mirror infinity. It is an appropriate symbol to a philosophy of such cosmic pessimism.

Though the characterization of the novel is handled with warmth, the occasional antics of the rustics with humor, the dramatic unities with precision and the earth image with artistic sensibility, the work falls short of great tragedy. The major reason for this shortcoming is that Clym who, though he may anticipate the modern flawed protagonists of literary art, does not adequately fulfill the role his creator has assigned him in this particular work. Because Clym is more ordinary and less heroic than he might be, he better typifies the man of the future that he is supposed to be, but his mediocrity as human figure mitigates the nature of tragedy. There is no real catharsis. The very

failure of the Promethean myth to fit the hero causes not a cathartic reaction, but a passive acceptance, perceived as parody or irony.[17] Clym is not heroic; he is merely pathetic. For this cause there is perhaps an even sadder irony at the core of The Return of the Native. Perhaps the work suggests--either consciously or unconsciously--that not only are man's days few and full of trouble, but also that man cannot of his own will become noble, fine or god-like. He is reduced, like Clym, to creeping blindly across the face of the earth, aware that rebellion is useless and acceptance is ignoble. The Return of the Native is the first complete expression of the cosmic naturalism of Hardy's maturity.

[17]Norman H. Holland, The Dynamics of Literary Response (Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 261.

CHARACTER AND THE COSMOS

TWO ON A TOWER

It would be a gross error to claim that Hardy's work invariably attains great artistic merit. Just as his strengths as a novelist are many, his faults are also numerous: over-plotting, melodrama, strained episodes of chance and super-imposed landscapes on the skeletons of plots. Two on a Tower has never been appreciated by Hardy critics as one of his more successful works and that with just cause. Published in 1882, midway between two outstanding novels but during an artistic drought of dry, barren years of Hardy's art, it nevertheless makes an interesting contribution to the developing pattern of Hardy's earth image. It is his aim "to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men."[18] The critics claim, however, that he depends on intrigue with the consequent obscuration of theme[19] and that the novel is pitched at so violent an angle of improbability that the "astronomical machinery nearly crushes the lives

[18]Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, p. 16.

[19]Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1962), p. 124.

out of the characters instead of rendering them tragically pitiable."[20]

Though it would be purposeless to argue with critics as to the novel's merit, it is informative to study the novel as a piece in the developing pattern of earth imagery in Hardy's fiction. In The Return of the Native the characters are dwarfed by the physical aspects of nature on the heath and in Two on a Tower Hardy again manipulates this image. Viviette is a "dark spot on an area of brown"[21] and a "mere spot absorbed in the black mass of the fir plantation." (p. 166) This changing of visual perspective for the purpose of reducing characters to a cosmic insignificance is one of Hardy's favorite methods of emphasizing the diminuitive nature of man's position in the universal sphere. But in Two on a Tower the author becomes even more ambitious; his characters are to suffer the fate of being minimized not only by the dark earth on which they are a spot but also by the glories of the stellar universe. The novelist wants to impress that, as man is only a microcosm in his human endeavors and human society, so also the realm of man's planet is of minor significance in the universal macrocosm of many spheres. The author's failure to sufficiently impress the reader with the magnitude of this theme is possibly because the characters pitted in his earthly drama just do not merit enough attention by their nobility of situation for the reader to care that their

[20]Morton D. Zabel, "Hardy in Defense of His Art," Hardy, ed. Albert J. Guerard (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.), p. 38.

[21]Thomas Hardy, Two on a Tower (New York, 1932), p. 12.

lives have been further dwarfed by the cosmos. The novel's chief interest to a study of this nature is that it furnishes an interesting link in Hardy's evolving philosophic view of the universe. It is as if the novelist is laying the universe out in a map for the reader to behold, to note that one tiny speck is our planet and then to imagine how insignificant in such a setting is the role of one human life. Hardy says this majestically when his major characters are in the tower observing the heavens through their telescope. "They more and more felt the contrast between their own tiny magnitudes and those among which they had recklessly plunged, till they were oppressed with the presence of a vastness they could not cope with even as an idea, which hung about them like a nightmare." (p. 63)

The novel opens on a note of death and winter with the skeletal image of death described at length (a favorite Hardy metaphor reminiscent of the skeleton-shaped lightning in Far From the Madding Crowd). The vegetable world forms the skeleton and the sun shining through the deadened forms emphasizes the shapes of death. (p. 3) The trees "sob" in the winter sun--the pathetic fallacy extended to Lady Viviette Constantine, the heroine of the novel whose existence is representative of passivity and sterility, her youth wasted by marriage to an older man of title and property who has since deserted her.

The dark weariness of the local milieu is contrasted to the bright sun shining on a solitary tower constructed ages ago to the memory of one of the Constantine progenitors. The symbol of the tower is one of the most obviously recurrent images of the

entire novel; it is on this deserted tower that a young astronomer has set up his make-shift observatory, to the tower and the astronomer that Viviette is drawn and to the tower that she comes to die in the youth's arms when Hardy closes the final chapter of her pathetic life. The bright sun and thriving life surrounding the tower emphasize life, potency and fecundity while the barren landscape epitomizes sterility and death.

The tower serves at once as a phallic symbol (considering the origin of the monument and its present inhabitant) and a temple of worship. The astronomer of the novel is Swithin St. Cleeve, who figures in the novel as a dutiful high priest of the nature of the cosmos, a "scientific Adonis." (p. 286) Swithin's position is an interesting and ironic twist of profession since his father had been a curate, servant of the orthodox Christian God rather than the mathematical order of the cosmos. Another interesting parallel of symbol is that the only other tower of the surrounding countryside is the church tower--Swithin's priesthood contrasted again with the spiritual priesthood, his physical and intellectual strength and masculinity in contrast with the lesser impressiveness of the church's strength. Though Hardy proclaims in a later preface that the novel in no way attacks the established church, there is without doubt a decadent church pictured in Two on a Tower. The Bishop of Melchester is the most rigid, egotistical and uncharitable character in the novel, perhaps in all Hardy's fiction. Even St. Cleeve, who possesses only physical beauty and a questioning intellect to the expense of a genuine capacity for unselfish love, is preferable to the Bishop who can profess none of these qualities.

The most elementary form of the earth image in Two on a Tower is the pathetic fallacy, a device that Hardy had employed in his earliest works and had come to use with increasing effectiveness as his art progressed. When Lady Constantine is separated from Swithin because of his work and the suspicions of the local peasants, a long procession of rainy days "pass their dreary shapes before her . . . the whole landscape dripping like a mop" (p. 66), a most dismal and homely image which reflects the quality of Viviette's existence. The fog is, when Viviette awaits Swithin's delayed appearance, a "white atmosphere . . . that adheres . . . to the ground like a fungoid grown from it and . . . makes . . . the turfed undulations look slimy and raw." (p. 51) This latter image is one of sympathy for Lady Constantine, but it is also an image of diseased nature, a symbolic form seen earlier in The Return of the Native and suggestive of the fungus-like growth and decay of nature in The Woodlanders. Hardy sustains this dominant mood of decay in such descriptions as "lichen-stained and mildewed" trees and "the liquid rust" of natural moisture. (pp. 5,6)

More frequently the pattern in the novel is to show forces of nature opposed to the human element rather than elements that sympathize with human characters. Bushes in this alien world are "one-eyed night creatures" (p. 23) similar to the "dismembered corpse" of nature in The Return. The forces of storm and hurricane emphasize the anger of the universe vented upon mortals presumptuous enough to attempt to shape their own destinies. When Viviette and St. Cleeve determine that they will marry regardless of what others might think or what convention dictates, the wind strikes

with the "determination of a conscious agent"; with a "grotesque purpose" the winds lash the tower and the lovers encased within. (p. 107) It seems as if the forces of nature, far from being indifferent to man's misery, actually conspire to wreck his happiness. This particular storm wrecks Swithin's home, thereby altering the course of their marriage plans and, consequently, their entire future relationship. Later when St. Cleeve has gone on a scientific expedition leaving Viviette to discover that, in addition to their marriage involving a legality that makes it void, she is also pregnant, the Bishop of Melchester comes forward to offer his suit. The clergyman is aided (and Viviette consequently harmed) by a blusterous wind that would suggest, Hardy says, the inaccessibility of her young lover who is separated from her by an ocean tossed by that same storm. (p. 263) The physical world is here an active agent in Lady Constantine's destruction.

Another dominant nature symbol in Two on a Tower is the tree symbol. It is in fact one of the few recurring images that become striking enough to take on the importance of symbol. St. Cleeve's world is a "primitive Eden" (p. 14) of unconsciousness, and Viviette, the older woman whose love marks his first real acquaintance with life, is Eve after the Fall. (p. 235) The tower and Swithin's hut are located in a grove of trees, a kind of Druid image since St. Cleeve figures as the high priest of his personal religion. The fir plantation is always described in similar terms; the trees are "sobbing" (p. 98), "funeral" (p. 56), skeletal (p. 3). The tree takes on another connotation of dying or death when the two lovers are rambling and meet the curate. As they fear discovery,

they pass "under a huge oak tree, whose limbs, irregular with shoulders, knuckles and elbows, stretched horizontally over the lane in a manner recalling Absalom's death." (p. 98) The relationship of human life to the tree is explored more completely and more artistically in The Woodlanders, a novel in which the tree metaphor figures as the major symbol; in Two on a Tower Hardy's use of the tree as a symbol of the life-death relationship is a foreshadowing of what the novelist is later to do with that particular image.

The major image of the novel is not really an earth image but a stellar one. In the novel St. Cleeve, the worshipper of the sun, is saved because he is in harmony with the universal world order. Though he loses his former love to death, there is the implication in the novel's conclusion that he will find happiness with a certain young maiden of the village who is nearer his age and background. Swithin understands the universe first from a scientific view but also from a personal understanding of its infinite magnitude. He explains to Viviette that the universe is composed on the "monsters called Immensities" (a Hardy term similar to his "Spinner of the Years" or "President of the Immortals" of his later works with the noted difference that here the implication is not of one universal mechanistic personality but rather the plural form of many monsters). Swithin further explains that "there is a size at which grandeur begins . . ." followed in course by the sizes of "solemnity," "awfulness" and "ghastliness." (p. 33) The final adjective approaches the size of the universe.

When Lady Philosophy to whose service St. Cleeve has devoted

his life deserts him, and nature in a rain storm causes his near-fatal illness, Swithin is saved not only by his physical stamina but also by the renewed hope and interest in life sparked by the coming of a new comet. Chance brings the opportunity of a notable discovery in astronomy just at the moment Swithin needs the encouragement for survival. The sun is friendly to her high priest; it is invariably described as intense and warm for Swithin, humid and unpleasant for Viviette. It is always Swithin who understands the mechanism of the universe; it is lamentable that he possesses so little understanding of human nature.

Upon returning from his scientific expedition, St. Cleeve senses the old horror that he had earlier attempted to explain to Viviette that in "the ghostly finger of limitless vacancy . . . infinite deeps . . ." pervade with "a more than lonely loneliness." (p. 271) The descriptions of the vast entity of the universe are undoubtedly Hardy's reaction; they hardly ring true as Swithin's. As a human being the astronomer can only see the glories of the abstract universe but nothing of the world within. It is the novelist only who is concerned with the magnitude of that world.

It is fatal irony that Viviette, who is alone sensitive to the feelings of other human beings (which is Hardy's final concern in all his fiction), is misunderstood by the same universe that St. Cleeve worships. Admittedly through much of the novel the heroine is prompted by her own passion, her own caprice, her own need to grasp a piece of happiness in this present world. In fairness to Viviette, however, it should be remembered that the previous major feminine characters--Elfride Swancourt, Bathsheba

Everdene and Eustacia Vye--were motivated by the same feminine needs. Viviette's decision to release her young lover is the only human action in the entire novel worthy of being considered noble. "God only concerns himself wi' his upper orcatures" says one of the peasants when Lady Constantine has lost her inheritance and has become as financially and socially insignificant as he. (p. 86) The powers of the universe have no sympathy for one of the lower creatures who fails, the writer says, to follow the religious code of "save thyself" for the more honorable one of saving the person she loves and sacrificing herself for him. Viviette sees the night sky in its splendor; she looks through the telescope on the tower; she vaguely understands the oppressive solitude of the universe. But for her comprehension of a more basic human truth she receives only misfortune and death. Such are the terms of an unfeeling cosmos.

Before the close of the novel Viviette experiences a somewhat mystical event. It is at the "metallic radiance" at close of day when she sees what she believes to be a golden-haired toddling infant. It is actually a bunch of fern prematurely yellowed by the sun that she sees waving in a breeze. Shortly thereafter the heroine realizes that she is pregnant. In the view of J. O. Bailey this phantom child is Viviette's "vision of the self,"[22] a self-perception or understanding reached by increased awareness of the senses arising out of intense emotional suffering. Bailey interprets Knight's vision of Elfride's open coffin in

[22]J. O. Bailey, "Hardy's Visions of the Self," Studies in Philology, LVI (1959), p. 82.

A Pair of Blue Eyes, Bathsheba's vision of Troy's ghost in Far From the Madding Crowd and Eustacia's view of herself as Susan Nunsuch's effigy in The Return of the Native as being in this same category. In Viviette's case the vision is provoked by a physical nature that is only occasionally empathic to her.

At the close of Two on a Tower the observatory has been dismantled, the tower deserted, Swithin has outgrown his infatuation for Lady Constantine and has made a reputation for himself; Viviette Constantine is dead, but the amelioration comes in the form of the golden-haired boy that Viviette had seen in the vision. Hardy never states his hope, but an optimistic philosophical view can read the child as a basis for synthesis of the particular strengths of both parents--the intellectualism of Swithin and the compassion of Viviette. Yet a final doubt can be perceived by Hardy critics who realize the potential for the child's inheriting also the frailties of both parents--his father's selfishness and his mother's shallowness. Whether the child is destined to be strong or weak, he can expect in Hardy's universe to suffer ills to an inordinate degree. Regardless of individual character, each human being in Thomas Hardy's philosophic view of the cosmos can scarcely deserve less good and more evil than he receives at the hands of fate.

THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

The Mayor of Casterbridge is an effort in which Thomas Hardy deliberately points in new directions both by his changing use of the earth image and by his stated interest in character as a determiner of fate. Although the statement attributed to Novalis is an inexact quote that Hardy probably found not in the German original but in The Mill on the Floss,[23] the implications of the statement "character is fate" re-enforced by the sub-title "A Story of a Man of Character" influence the course that any sensitive criticism of the novel must pursue.

Numerous studies have been executed on the character of Michael Henchard as a man of destiny, a hero of tragic proportion. He has been compared to Lear, Oedipus, Macbeth and King Saul, the latter an interpretation hinted by the author in frequent Biblical allusion. On one point the critics are in agreement; in the character of Henchard Hardy has created a figure capable of tragedy--a man with the pride and stubbornness of a Lear, the impulsive wrath and desire for retribution of an Oedipus, the jealousy and revenge of Saul, the studied and premeditated ambition of Macbeth. Henchard approaches the tragic vision more nearly than any other male character in the corpus of Hardy fiction. He lacks the bland

[23]W. E. Yuill, "'Character is Fate': A Note on Thomas Hardy, George Eliot and Novalis," Modern Language Review, LVII (1962), p. 401.

wistfulness and inept visionary hope of Clym Yeobright; he is not given to the willful resignation and inactive remorse of Jude Fawley. In an existential point of view, Henchard is the one character who, though doomed to failure, misery and disappointment induced in part by his own fatal character faults, maintains his constant struggle with the self and with destiny until the very end. Henchard is drawn as a mighty beast caged by the prison of his own temperament, a "netted lion"[24] or a "bull trying to break fence." (p. 233) He is invariably described metaphorically in terms of a beast of power and mastery; he survives the novel as the single figure grand in despair. According to one critic he comes nearest of all modern heroes to Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero.[25]

Hardy has himself said that tragedy is the "Worthy encompassed by the Inevitable."[26] Henchard represents in this novel the worthy; the implications of his character coupled with an unsympathetic universe comprise the inevitable. Robert Kiely has called the central philosophy of the novel "the thought that man may be alone in nature--which means his own human nature as well as the natural world--without recourse to an omniscient judge or a comprehensible standard of reason . . ."[27] Michael Henchard does indeed stand alone and the position that this novel represents is

[24]Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (Boston, 1962), p. 262.

[25]William R. Rutland, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1962), p. 207.

[26]Ian Gregor, "What Kind of Fiction Did Hardy Write?" Essays in Criticism, XVI (1966), p. 301.

[27]Robert Kiely, "Vision and Viewpoint in The Mayor of Casterbridge," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XXIII (1968), p. 196.

that each man must rise and fall on his own merits, must face the implications of his own natural temperament. Characters in The Mayor use the same terms that previous individuals had used to describe miraculous intervention in their lives. Eustacia's "Prince of the World" becomes to Henchard "a sinister intelligence" bent on punishing him. (p. 108) When he is saved from death, Henchard believes himself to be in "Somebody's Hand." (p. 259) Elizabeth-Jane hesitates tempting Providence "to hurl us down as he has done before" (p. 75) and later wonders what unwished-for thing Heaven would send to replace the lover she had wanted but had not received. (p. 154) Even the practical Donald declares that "It's Providence" that he stay to make his future in Casterbridge. (p. 55) Susan expects anything "at the hands of Time and Chance except, perhaps, fair play." (p. 2) Lucetta, fearing things will take a turn for the worse, takes kindly to anything fate offers for the moment. (p. 153) Perhaps it is not Providence but his own will that causes Farfrae to change his mind about emigrating; maybe it is not God but his own superstition that saves Henchard from suicide. At any rate it is readily plain that, though Hardy declares character to be fate, his characters believe themselves to be propelled through time and circumstance by the force of Providence, God or Somebody. It remains to be seen whether the creator or the created understand the key to the truth of the cosmos.

The character of Michael Henchard, the protagonist, is drawn in a remarkably clear fashion. He is a man given to no moderation (p. 65), but rather one who loves and hates to extremes. He is "fetichistic" in searching out a chapel to make the vow of

abstinence. (p. 14) He is possessed of a "dogged, unflinching spirit," (p. 70), given to jealousy and temper, impulsive in his desires, a man of "moods, glooms and superstitions." (p. 216) The shallow surface of Henchard's temperament covers a disposition of "unruly volcanic stuff" (p. 96) that erupts in the impulse of the moment rather than in premeditated, cold-blooded wrong. Despite the wrongs he commits against the characters whom he in turn loves and despises, he declares, " . . . my heart is true." (p. 248) The major tragedies of such a strong character are that his remarkable potential is channeled always in the most destructive directions--destructive both to himself and to others--and that one who so desperately wants to be good and noble is plagued by his continual inability to escape evil. "Why should I still be subject to these visitations of the devil," he laments, "when I try so hard to keep him away?" (p. 266)

Though character is stressed as a mover of fate in The Mayor of Casterbridge, the force of chance is always readily available to aid in one's undoing. In the sin of Henchard's youth it is his character that provides the offer of wife sale, but it is chance that provides the buyer. It is Henchard's impulsive character that prevents his making adequate preparations for inclement weather in the outdoor entertainment, but it is nature that sends the chance cloudburst that ruins the festivities. (Nature also willingly sends rain as an omen on other important occasions in Henchard's life: his second marriage to Susan, the loss of Elizabeth-Jane by estrangement and of Lucetta by marriage to another, and finally his financial disaster in rash speculation on harvest

weather.) It is a combination of character, chance and irony that Michael confesses to Elizabeth-Jane that she is his daughter, then finds a document that proves she is not while he is searching for information that will prove the opposite. It is also his own temperament and chance that delay his calling on Lucetta before she meets and loves Donald Farfrae. The rivalry with Farfrae is inspired by the emulation, jealousy and emotional insecurity of Henchard, but it is aided and abetted by chance such as in the instance of the highly symbolic crash of Henchard's and Farfrae's haywagons. Character is important in bringing Henchard to his tragic destiny, but the ever-ominous chance happening builds irony and parallels character in the story of the protagonist's ruin.

Very frequently in the literature of naturalism the factor of character is not left to individual human volition anyway. Darwinism and later Freudianism lead to a belief that certain traits, weaknesses and behavorial objectives are inbred genetically by one's parents, acquired by one's culture, or simply latent as part of mankind's racial unconscious. If there is truth to this allegation in the case of Hardy fiction, then perhaps character and fate are to a degree inseparable after all. Individuals may be fated by a combination of genes, circumstances, culture and environment to possess a certain character that in turn leads them to pre-determined fates. For instance, Henchard's thanatos, or death wish, is a part of his psychological make-up that is merely an exaggerated form of the same impulse within all mankind. His love of music and his incapability of producing anything musical or even aesthetically pleasant is scarcely his fault. His traits

of superstition and wrathfulness are faults that he is not conscious of having developed, and he is vainly trying to overcome them. His psychological drive to love and be loved is a need common to all men. In short, an acceptance of the maxim "character is fate," even when considered without the characters' insistence on some other force in their lives or without the element of chance, does not altogether place the burden of Michael Henchard's guilt and tragedy upon his own shoulders, nor does it prevent the world's being a difficult place in which no human being "deserved less than was given." (p. 290)

Apart from the naturalistic trends of viewing character and fate there is still one other aspect to be considered in Michael Henchard's peculiar situation, and that is the archetypal role that he is created to fill. Henchard realizes that he is but an actor in an immense drama, and by the novel's end he has "no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him." (p. 277) Though the statement emphasizes Henchard's thanatos, it also reveals something else of the novel. It exhibits an attitude that a human being such as Henchard memorizes his lines, makes the proper entrances and exits and thus fulfills his life's role. With Henchard the particular role is that of "scapegoat king" agree Frederick Karl[28] and Richard Carpenter.[29] He is the powerful ruler with a dismal secret from his past who is finally banished, bearing upon his head the sins of himself and of his people. In addition to filling this mythic role, Henchard fills also particular roles as delineated by Hardy

[28]Frederick R. Karl, An Age of Fiction (New York, 1964), p. 309.

[29]Carpenter, p. 111.

in his allusions. "'Tis as simple as Scripture history," says Henchard in an ironically rich comment on the finality of wife-selling, not knowing that he, Henchard, is destined to fulfill the Scripture history. Henchard plays first the role of King Saul,[30] mighty ruler of Israel supplanted by the psalm-singing, charismatic David (Donald Farfrae in The Mayor). As Saul lost his daughter Michel in marriage to David, Henchard loses Elizabeth to Farfrae; as the people of Israel chanted, "Saul has slain his thousands; David his ten-thousands," so the people of Casterbridge claim, "Mr. Henchard can't hold a candle to [Farfrae]." (p. 86) Saul's enraged attempt on David's life is seen in Henchard's one-armed combat that is supposed to end in death for one of the combatants; and Saul's interview with the witch of Endor is mirrored by Henchard's superstitious dependence on the weather prognostications of Mr. Fall. Hardy so much as states the similarity when he has Henchard say that he feels "like Saul at his reception by Samuel." (p. 161)

In addition to the Saul-figure, Henchard is upon two occasions in the novel a less-scrupulous Job who curses the day of his birth (pp. 67, 248), and he ends the tragedy of his existence as the outcast brother: "I--Cain--go alone as I deserve--an outcast and a vagabond." (p. 271) Michael Henchard understands that he is to fill a certain tragic role ("I am to suffer, I perceive." p. 107) and that he cannot escape the implications of this destiny. Call

[30]Julian Moynahan has been recognized for first publishing the critical comparison of Henchard and Saul. ("The Mayor of Casterbridge and the Old Testament's First Book of Samuel: A Study of Some Literary Relationships," PMLA, LXXI (March 1956), pp. 118-130. Observations in this thesis are my own; they are similar to Mr. Moynahan's.

him a scapegoat king or Cain the wanderer; regard him as King Saul the mighty ruler of Israel or Lear, who rejects his Cordelia (Elizabeth-Jane) and ends his pitiful life escorted by a Fool (Abel Whittle). But whatever the term used or the analogy applied, Michael Henchard's destiny is not entirely his own; he is enacting a ritualistic role for himself and for the efficacy of a people. He is, says J. H. Miller, one of a long line of similar victims of the Immanent Will stretching before and after his life.[31]

This re-enactment of a role that was created for Henchard before his entry into the world is supported by the cyclical patterns of events and of nature within the novel. The story occupies a quarter of a century from the time Henchard enters Casterbridge as an itinerant hay-trusser until he leaves it for the final time in that same position. The seasons of agricultural Casterbridge pass from one harvest to another during which time is seen a reversal of the positions of Henchard and Farfrae and the protagonist a participant in several other cycles, for instance the meeting of the supplicant Susan at Casterbridge Ring followed by the meeting of the other woman whom he has wronged at that same structure some years later. (The old Roman amphitheatre itself may participate in this emblematic pattern.) Henchard repeatedly returns to certain geographic locations in or near Casterbridge where he remembers what happened the last time he was at this place and how curiously things have come full circle since that time. (For example, he visits the hill where he had

[31]J. Hillis Miller, Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire (Cambridge, Mass.,1970), p. xi. Preface.

tried to warn Farfrae of his wife's serious illness at a later date when Farfrae has re-married. He finds that "the place was unchanged, the same larches sighed the same notes; but Farfrae had another wife." p. 280) Henchard finally tries to end the circular pattern of his life by leaving Casterbridge and his miserable fate behind him, but he finds that his hay-trussing labors take him in a circular pattern of which his former town is the center. The novelist describes it as the "centrifugal tendency imparted by weariness of the world . . . counteracted by the centripetal influence of his love for his stepdaughter." (p. 276) Not only is Henchard's life a repetition of a drama enacted from the beginning of time, there is within this particular pattern of one human existence a familiar cycle of movement, event and fortune.

One of the cycles in Henchard's behavorial pattern is closely related to a major natural symbol in the novel. He is continually drawn to water. At every crisis in his life he returns to the same source to brood, to repent, to console himself, to feel remorse. Typically in literature water imagery is symbolic of reincarnation, a spiritual rebirth. This may not, however, be true in Hardy's fiction; the natural world in Wessex is often ironically juxtaposed with what ought to be right. As has been noted previously, the water in The Return of the Native brings death instead of life. Though Henchard goes to the pool to drown himself at a climactic scene of the novel, he does not commit suicide. He is saved by the effigy in the water, another example of J. O. Bailey's "image of the self." Henchard is saved by the

miraculous intervention of the "Someone" who has caused the effigy to be there at the exact right moment. Or so he thinks. Perhaps it should be considered whether the saving of his life is a blessing or a curse.

The earlier scenes in which Michael Henchard is drawn to the rejuvenating streams in The Mayor are the occasions upon which his spirit needs the renewal he has failed to find elsewhere. When he first learns of Elizabeth-Jane's true parentage, Henchard wanders to the banks of the Schwarzwasser River, the precincts of which are "sunless, even in summer time . . . in winter . . . the seedfield of all the aches, rheumatisms and torturing cramps of the year." (p. 108) The river is the location of the old Casterbridge county jail and the gallows, which reminds Henchard that a figure is missing from the scene, presumably the executed likeness of the Mayor himself, the same figure he does later see floating in Ten Hatches Hole. The dark lonely melancholy of the scene succeeds in imparting to Henchard on this occasion a kind of recognition of his personal melancholy. Though nature offers neither hope nor aid for trouble, it does provide solace for a son of the soil who returns to his primal origin in time of pain. To the same spot Henchard is drawn after his bankruptcy; he even takes up residence in the deserted priory and mill near the River. He comes back to brood after his physical combat with Donald Farfrae, and he comes again on the night of his contemplated suicide.

Upon this dramatic occasion the waters offer "singular symphonies" to the soul of the music-loving Henchard. "At a hole in a rotten weir they executed a recitative; where a tributary brook

fell over a stone breastwork they trilled cheerily; under an arch they performed a metallic cymballing; and at Durnover Hole they hissed." (pp. 256-57) At the point in the weir where the circular current imparts a "very fugue of sounds" Henchard plans to end his life. But the weir does not provide for Henchard the willing grave it had prepared for Eustacia and Wildeve; instead Michael Henchard is saved by "Somebody," saved for more anguish of suffering. Upon this occasion the waters have failed to provide either rebirth for life or an easeful death. The "Somebody" who saved his life is the same "sinister intelligence" bent on punishing him; the miraculous intervention is, on later reflection, felt to be more diabolical than divine.

The earth personality as a prime moving force in the novel is not so readily apparent as it had been in The Return of the Native. Though Hardy makes characteristically naturalistic comments about the appearance of nature (such as the sun setting like a "drop of blood on an eye-lid"), the environment is not as observably present as Egdon Heath had been. Nature is still there causing some to prosper and others to perish, but the implication of personal involvement is more emphasized. While it is difficult to estimate the Mayor's character as causing his downfall any more than Eustacia's or Wildeve's had caused theirs, the feeling of the earth as a malevolent power waiting to spring upon man and devour him is not so apparent. Perhaps the difference is that in the former novel the Heath more consciously represents the cosmos than nature does in The Mayor of Casterbridge.

It is interesting that the messages from nature and the affinity to the earth force are most frequently perceived by the Mayor,

since the narrator usually observes natural wonders through his protagonist's view. For example, on the evening of the sale of his wife the young Mike Henchard watches the evening turn gray and black like "a grand feat of stagery from a darkened auditorum" (again the metaphor from the drama) and abjures man as a blot on an otherwise kindly universe until he remembers that it is not often so, that more frequently it is the universe that is injurious to man. (p. 11). On the day of the outdoor entertainment the Mayor stands near the River Froom and watches the rain "resolve itself into a monotonous smiting of earth by heaven," the landscape over the river disappear in a dark sky and the wind play "aeolian improvisations" on the tent-cords. (pp. 89-90) The night is a "fiend" to Henchard on the fateful evening that he is drawn to the river to ponder over the loss of his child. On the road to the weather-prophet's house it rains heavily and the shrouded figure of Mike Henchard stumbles over the "natural springes formed by the brambles." (p. 160) But the weather deceives Henchard when he has speculated heavily (betting on rain and a poor harvest); the tin-colored sun ironically changes to topaz. (p. 161) When Henchard tries to warn Farfrae of Lucetta's dangerous illness, he waits on Yalbury Wood road where the wind "moans" pathetically through the masses of spruce and larch. This nature-identification is not quite like the pathetic fallacy; instead of nature understanding and sympathizing with the human sufferer, it is the human figure that understands and ponders the power and the moods of nature.

Twice in the novel--at the opening and again at the close--a

bird is used for a symbolic portrayal. In the wife selling scene the last swallow of the season held captive within the tent is a symbol of the "trap" of marriage. At Elizabeth-Jane's wedding celebration a goldfinch in a cage, the "token of repentence" of Michael Henchard, is left to starve. The failure of Henchard's repentence symbol is reminiscent of the inefficacy of the flowers planted on Fanny's grave by Sergeant Troy and washed away by the rainstorm. The token doesn't matter in either case to the living or to the dead; one never escapes the implications of his past mistakes. The ghosts of Henchard's sins have consistently returned to haunt him and to destroy him. It is to his credit that he faces death and oblivion with only the companionship of these ghosts and the village simpleton. The man's proportions, his fate, his persistence, his courage and final humility make The Mayor of Casterbridge "as much an affirmation of faith in the transcendent worth of the human person as it is an acknowledgement of man's precarious situation in a blind and uncertain universe."[32]

[32]Robert C. Schweik, "Character and Fate in Hardy's The Mayor of Casterbridge," Nineteenth Century Fiction, XVIII (1966), p. 262.

THE INEVITABILITY OF PAIN AS NATURE'S LAW

THE WOODLANDERS

Lord David Cecil claims that no other English novelist had a greater feel for nature than Thomas Hardy.[33] If this be true, it can be added that in no other novel does Hardy achieve the continuity of a nature-inspired mood more effectively than he does in The Woodlanders. In this novel the combined forms of nature--atmospheric conditions, trees, moss, vines and fungi, decay and rot combine to make the novel a masterful evocation of an oppressive mood. "There was now a distinct manifestation of morning in the air, and presently the bleared white visage of a sunless winter day emerged like a dead-born child."[34] "In the hollow shades . . . could be seen dangling etiolated arms of ivy which . . . were groping in vain for some support, their leaves being dwarfed and sickly for want of sunlight . . ." (p. 35) "On older trees still than these, hugh lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen eat the vigor of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death

[33]Lord David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist (New York, 1943), p. 23.

[34]Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (New York, 1923), p. 32.

the promising sapling." (p. 77)

The feeling of death and decay in The Woodlanders expresses most vividly Hardy's sense of the Immanent Will (or Unfulfilled Intention) that leads man, not so much to the nobility of tragedy as in The Mayor of Casterbridge, but more to a pathetic, miserable, pointless existence which is life. Much has been said of the influence of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann in shaping the philosophy of Thomas Hardy; in The Woodlanders such a philosophic view becomes prominently observable through the abundance of imagistic natural description of nature such as that quoted above. To Hardy the Will of Schopenhauer is a cause, a force, a destiny that has not become directed in a meaningful pattern. The novelist has long since lost all faith in a beneficient god-creator who plans men's destinies through His providential care; the universe instead operates in purposeless meanderings of evils, tragedies, pointless sufferings and endless dyings. The term "Unfulfilled" when applied to the "Intention" or "Will" adequately portrays the lack of meaning and direction of the universal Will.

Gloomy and pessimistic though it may be, The Woodlanders exudes a poetry all its own. The dark, brooding intensity of the forest surrounds the reader; the mist and fog of the woodlands envelop him in an atmosphere; the sights and sounds of woodland creatures captivate; the "speaking loneliness" of the ancient trees profoundly impresses. And not always is the description grotesquely ugly; it often has a strange, sweet and haunting loveliness. For example, characters at night walk down a lane "under boughs which formed a black filigree in which the stars seem set."

(p. 113) At an early winter auction of timber, "A few flakes of snow descended, at the sight of which a robin, alarmed at these signs of imminent winter and seeing that no offense was meant by the human invasion, came and perched on the tip of the fagots that were being sold." (p. 80) Another scene of winter describes: "It was snowing with a fine flaked desultoriness just sufficient to make the woodland gray, without ever achieving whiteness." (p. 186) Still another pictorial description is prior to winter:

> "Autumn drew shiveringly to its end. One day something seemed to be gone from the gardens; the tenderer leaves of vegetables had shrunk under the first smart frost, and hung like faded linen rags; then the forest leaves, which had been descending at leisure, descended in haste and in multitudes, and all the golden colors that had hung overhead were now crowded together in a degraded mass underfoot, where the fallen myriads got redder and hornier, and curled themselves up to rot." (p. 321)

No amount of mere quoting of nature description can communicate the feeling of being surrounded by and being a part of nature that one has in reading The Woodlanders. It seems apt, however, in light of the multiple criticisms of Hardy to give him just praise for whatever he does well. In The Woodlanders the forest is sometime enchanting, often ominous and formidable, frequently symbolic of disease and decay--but it is always impressive.

In this natural Arcadian setting the novelist places an unlikely assortment of human dwellers: Marty South and Giles Winterborne, true Arcadians and natural children of the woodland; Grace Melbury, daughter of a timber merchant, raised in the forest and betrothed to one of its sons, but bringing to her home the corrupting influences of refinement and education; Edgar Fitzpiers, the sensuous, intellectual and unnatural invader; and Felice Charmond,

the cigarette-smoking, bored and wealthy manor-owner on whose whims the welfare of the woodlanders depends. Critics voice as one of their most frequent complaints of this particular novel the objection that the action does not center around the destiny and fate of one central protagonist, that no single character draws attention to his particular tragedy in the manner of Eustacia, Henchard, Tess or Jude. There is absolutely no denying this charge. If a great novel depends in part upon the strong personality of a single character who dominates the interest of the work, then The Woodlanders fails. What begins and ends as Marty's story is at times Grace's or Gile's, or more infrequently Fitzpier's or Mrs. Charmond's. However, the novel may still be read with a view to the strength of its philosophy, the mood of its imagery, the sometimes contrived but often intriguing pattern of events, or the poetic and aesthetic integration of imagery and meaning.

On the topic of his philosophy, first, Hardy remains remarkably lucid throughout The Woodlanders. Students of Hardy familiar with his earlier works cannot fail to spot all the evidences that are hardly clues but rather more like blanket indictments of the cruelty of the universe and the movements of the Immanent Will. Just as Eustacia Vye cried out against Heaven's injustice in punishing her, or Elizabeth-Jane Newson wondered what unwished-for thing Heaven would send in Farfrae's place, the cries against the unfairness of things are voiced occasionally by the characters themselves. But more often than not it is the editoralizing by the author who makes such statements as, "If Heaven would only

give her strength; but Heaven never did!" (p. 389) or who describes a character's looking "as though he has suffered wrong in being born." (p. 362) The sense of Hardy's statement that no man ever deserved at the hands of fate less good and more evil than he received is especially strong in The Woodlanders, as is the feeling that man is himself not morally responsible for his weaknesses. This deterministic view of Hardy's is felt particularly strongly in such observations as the presence of an "intangible Causality which has shaped the situation no less for the offenders than the offended." (p. 120) Repeatedly Hardy uses the terms: "time," "Providence," "destiny," "fate," "predestination," and "circumstance," impressing upon the reader that the power of the unforseen directs men's lives always in unwanted directions.

The plot as well as the indictments of the universe are evidences of Hardy's increasingly pessimistic view. For example, Giles Winterborne parallels in characterization and in plotting the roles of Gabriel Oak and Diggory Venn. But Oak in Far From the Madding Crowd is rewarded in love with the hand of Bathsheba Everdene, the novel's beautiful heroine. Even Venn in The Return of the Native marries Thomasin Yeobright, who like Bathsheba has loved and wed unwisely, has been wronged and finally widowed by her husband, and who has learned patience and forbearance through suffering. Consider then that Winterborne, who is also a chaste lover worshipping from afar, who also accepts financial ruin in stride, and who also renounces any claim to a woman higher on the social ladder than he--just as Gabriel and Diggory had done before

him--is rewarded with the dubious privilege of giving his life for the thoughtless and prudish Grace Melbury, who promptly rewards him memory by reunion with the decadent libertine from whose presence Winterborne's death was supposed to have protected her.

Another example is the case of Marty South who, like Elizabeth-Jane in The Mayor or Thomasin in The Return, asks little measure of happiness at the hands of fate. In Thomasin's case there is the chastened happiness of marriage to a kind and good man; in Elizabeth-Jane's life she marvels at her good fortune in marrying the prosperous, successful and popular Mayor Farfrae when her youth had prepared her for the belief that happiness is "but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain." (The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 290) But Marty in The Woodlanders is the case of a human being who at the outset has nothing and from whom is taken more than she has. She loses her one claim to beauty and her home to poverty, her father and her lover to death, and her hope for any happiness to the general pathetic state of the universe. She is left at the novel's close homeless, fatherless and unloved, with only the memory of Winterborne who had not returned her love.

In many earlier novels the outsiders of a less-than-idyllic Eden were removed by death or disaster; this is not true in The Woodlanders. In Far From the Madding Crowd the dashing Sergeant Troy and the formidable Boldwood are outsiders and intruders in the Bathsheba-Gabriel love; they are removed, one by death, the other by insanity. In The Return of the Native the passionate

Eustacia and her lover, Wildeve, intrude on the idealistic dreams of Clym and the simple love of Venn and Thomasin; they are drowned in the weir as an aftermath to the multiple tragedies they have helped inflict. In Two on a Tower the heroine Viviette upsets the balance of society and the natural order by her overwhelming attraction to a younger man; she dies and Swithin marries a young woman. In The Mayor Lucetta intrudes on the incipient love of Farfrae and Elizabeth, and Henchard jealously tries to supplant Farfrae in Lucetta's affections; both Lucetta and Henchard die, leaving a somewhat peaceful amelioration in the marriage of Elizabeth-Jane and Donald Farfrae. In all these novels there is a measure of "poetic justice," of, if not catharsis, at least satisfaction. Though Eustacia, Wildeve, Henchard, Lucetta and others live in a universe in which they do not totally control their impulses or shape their lives, and can not thereby be blamed for being what they are, their deaths cause the novels to achieve a kind of balance in resolution.

In The Woodlanders things are slightly different. Grace Melbury returns from finishing school alienated to a degree from nature. (She cannot to Giles' disappointment distinguish between John-apple and bitter-sweet trees.) She captures Giles' heart, but longs for someone nearer her sensibilities and intellectual attainments. After marriage to the intellectual and idealistic, but capricious, Dr. Fitzpiers, disappointment in his amorous adventures with other women, separation and the attempted annulment that revives Giles' hope, and finally after her foolhardy escapade that exposes Giles to the elements and takes his life,

she is reunited with a supposedly reformed Fitzpiers. It is true that Hardy hints in the closing that her chances for happiness are not good, but had she been Eustacia or Lucetta, Grace would have ended far differently. Fitzpiers is the same sensuous, dashing, attractive, egotistical and faithless male that Troy and Wildeve had been. At the novel's end he has regained the woman that he for the moment loves more than anyone while the people whom he and Grace have thoughtlessly wronged are dispersed--two in their graves (though in the case of Mrs. Charmond it seems to be more a necessity of plotting than the implications of a serious philosophic view), one waiting for Grace to accompany her on a weekly vigil at Giles' grave, and one (a distracted father) looking all over the countryside for his lost daughter, while Grace and Fitzpiers have impetuously gone off on a second honeymoon. The cosmic irony of The Woodlanders is not a matter of how many characters die or are doomed to misery during the course of the novel (the tally would probably be close in all the novels), but more an examination of who survives and who, like the trees of the woodland, is felled by destiny. A careful study of this element of the novel will reveal that in Hardy's form of philosophical Darwinism it is not always the strongest, the best or the most promising that survive. It is blind, cruel chance that some survive and others do not. For this reason The Woodlanders cannot be a tragic novel; it is rather a naturalistic recording of pathos. The characters are unwilling and often unknowing means of carrying out destiny's cruel plan.

The earth image of The Woodlanders re-enforces this naturalistic interpretation of plot and philosophy. In Hardy's fiction

nature is usually used in one of three methods: the pathetic fallacy or nature commiserating with man, the earth as a driving natural force antagonistic to man (as Egdon Heath in The Return of the Native) or nature as fellow sufferer with man. The Woodlanders incorporates this latter type of the earth image. The forest is Hardy's means of extending through the universe the same sufferings he sees in man.[35] Just as man must suffer at the hands of time and chance, so does nature. The forest knows a similar kind of rot and decay that human society experiences. The groping ivy and smaller plants of the forest struggle and grope to reach the healing and life-giving rays of the sun just as humans grope for enlightenment or meaning to their lives. The forest creatures feel an almost human sense of pain, as evidenced by the two birds that fall into the hot ashes of a campfire and are parted, causing Marty to compare their parting to the end of human love. (p. 212)

Through personifications the individual trees take on the characteristics of human beings. The young trees that Marty and Giles so skillfully plant sigh as if they are "sorry to begin life in earnest" just as mankind is. (p. 95) Some of the ancient trees are wrinkled "like an old crone's face" (p. 291); others suffer amputations of their limbs; one great oak is disfigured with "white tumors," its roots spreading out and grasping the ground (p. 312); in the winds trunks and branches stand out against the sky in the forms of "writhing men" (p. 378); on a dank and foggy night the

[35]William H. Matchett, "The Woodlanders, or Realism in Sheep's Clothing," Nineteenth Century Fiction, IX (1954), p. 257.

woods seem to be in a "cold sweat; beads of perspiration /hanging/ from every bare twig . . ." (p. 332); the felled and "barked" trees are prostrate in "white nakedness"; a bough of a tree smites the roof in the manner of a gigantic hand smiting the mouth of an adversary. (p. 455) The tree symbol is a popular romantic image of nineteenth century verse and fiction, but in The Woodlanders individual trees seem to take on a personality and a character, almost a soul. It is not just that trees represent men (except in the case of John South's elm), it is more nearly correct to surmise that the trees, individually and collectively, suffer at the hands of the "Unfulfilled Intention" or the "intangible Causality," just as men suffer. The woodlands mirror man's plight; they also participate in it.

The most obvious relationship of the life of a tree to the life of man is the case of the ailing woodlander John South, who fears his own life will be crushed by the old elm whose years exactly match his own. The tree is cut by Giles Winterborne in an attempt to save South's life. Ironically the felling of the tree causes not renewed hope for life, but rather South's death. The life of the man is irrevocably linked with the life of the tree; extinction of one means death for the other. Again the case is not so much man suffering at the hands of nature as it is man's and nature's sorrows running concurrently.

Thomas Hardy had tried and failed in Two on a Tower to create a universal image, to dwarf the lives of men against the wonders of the stellar cosmos. He needn't have tried anything so spectacular. In two of his finer novels he represents the wonders

and workings of the universe by the use of an earth image. In The Return of the Native Egdon Heath is the universe. And in The Woodlanders so is Hintock Woods. The simile of day's emerging like a dead-born child has already been mentioned. It is one of many descriptions of a world that is in constant travail bringing to fruition the universal Will. The personality of the woodland is felt in the descriptions of the vastness of the forest as seen through the eyes of a higher and greater power looking down upon it. The comparison of a road through the forest to a line parting a thick head of hair is more than a grotesque or unique simile. It is a brilliant stroke of mood-creating imagery and philosophical intention on the author's part. Hintock Woods, like Egdon Heath, is almost a personality. Night in the woods is a strange personality (p. 21), the dawn is cold and colorless (p. 324), the sky reflects sorrow and bitterness, and the rain is nature's agonized tears beating against windowpanes. (p. 292) The spectre quality of the woodlands is intensified by the usual presence of fog and mist. Though the rainstorm proves fatal to Giles' already failing health, it is a rain that pelts man, the forest, the woodland creatures, the lichen and moss. It is a rain that brings both a blessing and a curse, a rain that is nature's "agonized tears" lamenting the unfairness of it all rather than a rain that is nourishing malevolent intentions against any single man.

Still another use of natural descriptions is to add symbolic information about individual characters as nature had done in Far From the Madding Crowd. Marty and Giles live the natural life

deep in the woodlands; the gardens and environs of their particular homes are marked with fecundity. For example, at Giles' ill-fated Christmas party the game, fruit and vegetables are all from his woods, orchards and gardens. Considering the natural description here in comparison to Fitzpier's or Mrs. Charmond's homes is illuminating. The latter are surrounded, not with productivity, but with sterility or stagnation. At the home the Doctor has rented the garden-plot is shaded by trees that continually drip moisture on the young plants, starving and stunting their growth. (p. 182) Mrs. Charmond's manor house is located in a hollow into which the moisture is drawn, causing a profusion of thick, heavy foliage and an atmosphere of damp, disagreeable humidity "where slimy streams of green moisture, exuding from decayed holes caused by old amputations, /run/ down the bark of the oaks and elms, the rind below being coated with a lichenous wash as green as emerald." (p. 291) The whole atmosphere is one of still humidity and lazy stagnation; it exactly fits the bored, inactive occupant of Hintock House.

The major characters form too an aesthetically pleasing balance in their attitudes. Mrs. Charmond and Dr. Fitzpiers hate Hintock Woods with an intensity almost equal to Eustacia's hatred of Egdon Heath. Marty and Giles know and understand the woodlands that have been their home, their playground and nursery. Both come and go stealthily like sylvan spirits in the forest. Grace is a balance between the two extremes, often enjoying a ramble in the forest but like Mrs. Charmond becoming frightened when the two women are lost in the woods. Life does not blossom and

grow for Grace as it does for Marty and more particularly for Giles. Her heritage is that of a daughter of nature but her transplanting in other soil has brought changes of refinement and affectation that leave her not quite worthy of a strong and lasting bond with nature.

If the characters do not keep faith as realistic incarnations of flesh and blood, The Woodlanders can be read as myth. Hardy once wrote in a notebook, "The deepest want and deficiency of all modern art lies in the fact that artists have no mythology."[36] Hardy evidently did not believe himself to be lacking in mythology, his usual practice being a conscious revival of a Greek tragedy or Biblical account as in The Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbridge. In The Woodlanders the opening description of the narrow premises of the woods is seen as a place where "dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real." (p. 8) The implication of such a statement is that the reader can expect to find within the pages of the novel a tragedy of classic proportions. He does not. He finds instead a mythic re-enactment of a fertility form that has existed as long as or longer than recorded history.

Giles Winterborne, whom Hardy calls a fruit-god and a wood-god (p. 41), figures as the principal character in this particular fertility myth and, like Michael Henchard who was the principal actor in his particular cycle of the ever-present Immanent Will, Winterborne is powerless to stop the necessary propitiating

[36]Thomas Hardy, Thomas Hardy's Notebooks, ed. Evelyn Hardy (London, 1955), p. 51; quoted in James F. Scott, "Spectacle and Symbol in Thomas Hardy's Fiction," Philological Quarterly, XLIV (1956), p.542.

sacrifice to the seasonal cycle. The story begins in the early winter and Winterborne (consider the significance of the name) is first seen by Grace Melbury as he stands in the village square at Sherton-Abbas supporting the apple tree that advertises his business. Later in the novel when Giles and Marty South are seen planting young trees, great care is taken to explain that nobody--not even Marty--can encourage and produce new life in the growing saplings as can Giles Winterborne. Fewer of his young trees die than those planted by any other skilled woodman. For this reason his fellow-citizens of Little Hintock hire Winterborne to perform this loving labor, a ritualistic performance in which his role brings a potent life-giving and life-sustaining element to the forest. It has already been noticed that his home is marked with productivity and teeming life while so much of the neighboring woods, orchards and gardens are infertile and sterile. In the gorgeous autumn landscape of Giles' last year he is thought of by Grace Melbury as "Autumn's very brother" as he is seen with the apple pips and other signs of cider-making bespattered on his clothing.

Giles as both fruit-god and wood-god represents fecundity to both forms of occupations in the woodland--fruit and lumber, nature pruned and cultivated and nature left unchecked until the "harvest." The death of Giles in the subsequent autumn represents the yearly sacrifice and resurrection of Dionysus, whose coming in the spring and summer proclaims the production of grapes and of wine and whose death in the autumn and winter announces the temporary death of the vine and of all other vegetative life.

Giles' death may be seen also as a type of sacrificial offering, his cider press and apple orchards roughly paralleling the Dionysian fruit and produce and his death insuring the continued productivity of the young trees he had carefully planted and the orchards he had lovingly tended. The trees that Winterborne and Marty South have planted in the spring will continue to grow healthy and strong for many seasons after Winterborne's physical death, leaving behind him a kind of after-existence and immortality befitting Marty's pathetically sad statement, " . . . you was a good man, and did good things." (p. 543)

The mythic interpretation brings an added level of meaning to the novel and explains a kind of poetic wholeness and satisfying conclusion to a novel that otherwise is very bleak indeed. The amelioration in the forms of the young and strong who live to fight another day and the beauty of the life of one outstanding character may well be missing from The Woodlanders. In Winterborne's death there is the prevalent Hardy feeling that life will go on, that Hintock Woods, like Egdon, will still survive long after human individuals who have loved and hated, lived and died within its precincts have been forgotten. But there is a concluding feeling too that the life of a good man who makes things grow (like a good man who writes novels on the subject of man's helplessness in a cold universe) does count for something and that his efforts are not entirely in vain.

TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

Tess Durbeyfield is Nature's child. Nowhere in all his fiction does Hardy expend so much effort to establish an affinity of humankind and nature. Eustacia had understood nature and for her understanding hated what she knew; Clym and Thomasin had known and loved the heath; Bathsheba and Viviette had each experienced on at least one occasion nature's solicitous care; Mike Henchard and the woodlanders had felt the pangs of the natural world mirrored in their lives and their lives in turn reflected in the sorrows of nature. But Tess is special. She comes "trailing clouds of glory" though Hardy differs with Wordsworth as to the source of the glory. In the famous ode the poet ends the phrase, " . . . from God who is our home." Hardy cannot accept the pantheistic Wordsworthian God; Tess is Nature's child following Nature's law, and God is not a part of the picture.

More than a dozen times in the novel Hardy resorts to metaphors from the earth and natural creatures to describe the beauty, the aspect, the impulses, the form and expression of Tess. Her rich, thick cable of hair is "earth-colored " (p. 41), her cheek is as cool and as smooth as a mushroom (p. 99), her mouth is peony shaped (p. 12), the most maddening her seducer says since Eve's. Tess suns herself like a cat (p. 218) and the interior of her mouth as she awakens and yawns is as pink as a snake's.

(p. 217) Her eyes, when she is frightened, take on the look of a wild animal, and when her fate closes around her, she is like a bird caught in a springe. (p. 251) Tess's nature-provided bed on the night of her seduction and later beside the road of her lonely exodus to Flintcomb-Ash is a "little nest." And when she is taken by the law officers, she is the sacrificial victim lying on the altar of Stonehenge. The hunt then ends and the child of nature who had cried out against nature's cruel law, "once victim, always victim . . ." (p. 423) pays her debt to society and fulfills her role in nature.

Tess is also a part of nature in her sexual impulse in that she possesses an animal vitality unknown to other Hardy women (except Arabella whose bestiality is coarse and ugly). Tess is described physically in very explicit terms. The maturation of her body has preceded her development in years and emotional maturity, and Tess is embarrassed by her distinctly womanish features when she is still in years a young girl. After Tess has come to understand--and to bemoan--the lust she has inadvertently aroused in men, she feels a guilt that "in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her she was somehow doing wrong." (p. 395) Tess's devoted love to Angel Clare is not ethereal and mystical (though his love for her is to a degree); it is passionate and physical; it desires as much as to serve and comfort, to possess and be possessed. At Talbothay's Dairy when she is surrounded by the "oozing fatness and warm ferments" of nature germinating (p. 190), Tess also is warm, alive and fecund. "A particularly fine spring came round, and the stir

of germination was almost audible in the buds; it moved her, as it moved the wild animals, and made her passionate to go." (p. 126) As naturally as birds feel the season to migrate or fish the time to spawn, Tess understands in her very being the time to respond to the "brim-fulness of her nature" (p. 217), to love and to refrain from loving, to grasp onto life and to willingly give up life.

Not only is Tess d'Urberville nature's child, she seems to be Hardy's child too. One senses that the remarkable love the author feels for the heroine of this novel is one of Tess's greatest strengths. Regardless of one's personal philosophy of the universe, of his personal theology of God's providence as opposed to the agnostic doubt Tess comes to learn from Angel Clare, or of his personal ideas of what is morally right or wrong, the reader cannot help loving Tess too. Few characters in all literature inspire this permanent affinity of the human heart. And by knowing and loving Tess, one cannot help knowing and loving Thomas Hardy for his remarkably gentle depiction of the beauty of her innocent soul.

It is unfortunate that within one of the novel's greatest strengths lies also one of its most obvious weaknesses--that is Hardy's penchant for preaching. It is sufficiently tragic and fatalistic that Tess is beautiful and doomed, that an unfeeling cosmos and a mute Heaven allow such unmerited suffering and that there is not (in Hardy's view) a God-provided Heaven to atone for Tess's hell on earth. But Hardy quarrels with society as well. It is not just the "President of the Immortals" who is out to

get Tess; it is also society whose law she has broken and that is determined to punish her. Hardy picked quarrels with the social order before writing Tess; in The Woodlanders he had protested the divorce laws that would not allow dissolution of an unhappy marital union. But in Tess Hardy really overdoes it. Again and again he lauds Tess for not compulsively snatching at social salvation, impresses that she has not broken nature's law but only man's in her union with Alec or in the infant she has produced, and pities Sorrow, the illegitimate child whose only sin against society is in being born, the "bastard gift of shameless Nature." (p. 120) Even Clare's refusal to forgive the mistake of Tess's past is not a natural response; it is rather what society has taught Clare to accept or reject. The criticism here is not with Hardy's complaint, but rather with his continual re-wording of that complaint. Hardy is a skillful enough writer that after his first implication of society's rules as opposed to nature's, he has left his reader sufficient insight to make judgments coinciding with those the author designed without the continued authorial intrusion that comes dangerously close to didacticism.

Another subject of Hardy's complaint in Tess of the D'Urbervilles is his quarrel with God. Again this is nothing new to Hardy. In The Woodlanders he had criticized, "If only Heaven would help her, but Heaven never did," but in Tess the author becomes even more obviously bitter about God's role in the universe. For example, he criticizes the Jehovah of Exodus by saying it may well be good enough for divinities to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, but it is scorned by

ordinary human nature. (p. 91) Or, speaking of Tess's seduction and ironically wondering what has happened to the promised guardian angel, Hardy suggests that like the false god Baal of the Old Testament, Tess's angel is on vacation, or sleeping, or disinterested. (p. 91) Tess somehow understands that God has not extended His providence in caring for her little brothers and sisters and that she must provide for His deficiency. (p. 455) She denies God's personal concern for individual man by explaining to Alec, "How can I pray for you, when I am forbidden to believe that the great Power who moves the world would alter His plans on my account?" (p. 408) And the phrase about the President of the Immortals having "finished his sport with Tess" with which Hardy closes the novel comes very close to blasphemy. It is understandable that this President is the same being that has been variously called the Immanent Will, crass Casuality and Hap, or even the unconscious motivation within natural man, but in view of the many theological pronouncements in Tess of the D'Urbervilles this particular being sounds strangely more personal, individual, distinctly of the masculine gender and more sure of himself than the "Unfulfilled Intention." If the reference is not about the Christian God (an outraged Hardy defends himself against this charge in the 1892 Preface by quoting as precedent the lines from Lear: "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;/ They kill us for their sport"), it is perhaps not unfair to Hardy to conclude that the novelist's quarrel with God is due, not to His active presence in men's affairs, but rather to His conspicuous absence in a world that needs Him.

There is in Tess the pattern of a continual cycle of things

repeating themselves, people--especially Tess--being led to their ruin by a role they are destined to play and cannot abandon even if they will to do so. The pattern of the fortune of the d'Urberville family is repeated in its last and lowest branch. John Durbeyfield's descent into drink and ruin is a re-enactment of the dissolution of the once great family that had owned the surrounding acres and fine old mansions. Tess's own ruin follows an inevitable pattern--from the innocent maid of "Phase the First" to Alec's paramour with the tousled hair and satin wrapper that Angel finds in "Phase the Seventh." Tess's inherited qualities over which she has no control help precipitate her fall, just as such qualities had ruined Mike Henchard. (Tess's life is a mirror of the family ruin in the same way Henchard had played the fatal roles of Saul and Lear in his particular drama. There is an element of inescapable role-playing in the lives of both.)

Tess's destructive hereditary qualities are her bewitching good looks inherited from her mother, her slight incautiousness of character from the Durbeyfield line (p. 114), and her destiny from the history of the d'Urberville coach. She finally learns before her death that the coach had to do with a d'Urberville abducting a beautiful woman whom he killed, or she killed him (Alec, who gives Tess this information, can't remember all the details). The story serves as an omen of the killing of Alec that is almost destined by the blood-line and of the death-coach that Tess will hear as a signal of her own impending death. Whether or not the family history causes Tess's ruin or whether a superstitious belief in the portentous nature of the tale

unconsciously affects her life, it is definitely a power to be considered as--like the Immanent Will--always present hovering over Tess and waiting to destroy her. At least others in Tess's life believe there is something to thc pattern of the family ruin; Angel says in irony of Tess's background, "Here was I thinking you a new-sprung child of nature; there were you, the belated seedling of an effete aristocracy." (p. 297)

An omen even more obvious than the coaches and coffins of the d'Urbervilles is the blood-red imagery that surrounds Tess. The killing of Prince by a small shaft that pierces the horse's chest and the spattering of Tess with the animal's blood is an omen of the wound that pierces Alec's heart; the first incident makes Tess feel like a murderess and the second causes her to become one. Alec's rose pricks Tess's chin and causes it to bleed. The zealot with the paint pot who keeps returning to brandish his messages of doom across the countryside paints in scarlet hue, a symbol that, though it may not seem "realistic," is certainly true symbolically. Tess slaps Alec with her leather field glove and causes his lip to bleed, and Tess's attempt to go to Angel's family is thwarted among other things, by a piece of blood-stained butcher paper that blows across her path.

Other omens are integrated into the story. Mistletoe (sacred to the Druids) grows on the trees in the soft azure landscape of The Chase, the scene of Tess's loss of virginity. Ironically the plant is used by Angel to decorate the bridal chamber and dies there unnoticed after the heartbreak of Tess's confession of her seduction and the tragedy of their uncomsummated marriage,

and Tess is finally taken at Stonehenge, sacred worship place, many believe, of the Druids. Other ominous signs are the dairyman holding his knife and fork in the form of an incipient gallows (p. 154), a cock crowing three times as Tess and Angel drive away on their wedding day and an oath that Tess makes on a monument that she assumes to be a holy place but later learns to be a memorial to a malefactor who has been hanged.

Not only do the symbols and imagery build effectively to the climax of Tess's tragic fate, the conscious use of mythic material is employed by Hardy (and by his characters) to develop the Eden story.[37] The lush, productive paradise at Talbothays is an Eden in which Angel and Tess play an Adam and Eve surrounded by a teeming nature that repeats the Baroque quality of Milton's Eden. The reference to Tess as "Eve at her second waking" (p. 218) presumably refers to Eve's awakening after partaking of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. It is ironic that Angel meets Tess at her second wakening when he places so much value on the first. When Alec appears to Tess in the garden at Marlott, he is standing in the smokes of fires of dead weeds holding a pitchfork. He pictures himself as the archetypal intruder by quoting to Tess from Milton's Paradise Lost. The expulsion from Eden is represented by the wedding journey to Wellbridge, and, though Tess and Angel enjoy a few short days together before her capture, they can never go back to the blissful ignorance and joy of their early Eden.

[37]Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Tess of the D'Urbervilles," Twentieth Century Interpretations of Tess of the D'Urbervilles, ed. Albert J. LaValley (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1969), p. 60.

Another artistic strength of Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the close integration of nature with myth and symbol. When Tess leaves the "green valley" of her birth, she goes to claim kin to the phony d'Urbervilles in a "gray country." (p. 62) She makes a pilgrimage from the ancient to the new, from the green and fertile to the gray and ominous. The seduction scene is in a dying autumn touched by an "opalized light," "faint luminous fog," "a pervasive air," "webs of vapor forming between the trees" and "thick darkness" (pp. 84-90), dying leaves forming the couch in which Tess lies. From her place of sorrow Tess makes the spiritual pilgrimage back to her homeland where nature does not mourn for her sin but does provide sustenance through the land upon which Tess becomes a farm laborer. After the death of the infant and its burial in a corner of the cemetery where "God allows nettles to grow," she begins an exodus to the Froom Valley. The time is summer, the setting a parallel of Eden. "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." (p. 165) Richness oozes from the fertile ground and from the swelling teats of the cows. Despite Tess's wish that it can always be summer and early autumn, winter comes and with it her ill-fated marriage to Angel Clare. After Clare's rejection of Tess the landscape of gold has changed again to gray, "the colours mean, the rich soil mud and the river cold." (p. 321)

Tess of the D'Urbervilles employs not only the seasonal cycle to emphasize a symbolic statement, it also contrasts the valley

to the hillside for symbolic impact. Var Vale of the great dairies is lush, rich and fecund; the sterile upland of Flintcomb-Ash, where Tess spends the next episode of the journey of her life, is bleak and barren. Here Tess works in the swede harvest where "every leaf of the vegetable /has/ been eaten off by the live-stock, and . . . the whole field /is/ in colour a desolate drab; it /is/ a complexion without features, as if a face, from chin to brow, should be only an expanse of skin." (p. 363) The sky wears a like countenance of white blankness and the scene formed is one of "the white face looking down on the brown face, and the brown face looking up at the white face, without anything standing between but the two girls crawling over the surface of the former like flies." Here the turnips that Tess is hacking mock her in their ghostly reminders of her guilt and their irony of supposed potency where on the "starve-acre" place nature is not productive. To the coarse Marian the "bulbous, cusped and phallic shapes" are a wry joke; to Tess they are pathetic and tragic.

Tess's final pilgrimage to her home is accompanied by the death of her father and the subsequent loss of the land. Then she and the remainder of the Durbeyfields begin a migration that Hardy compares to the children of Israel's trek into Egypt and their flight out again, and the Durbeyfield belongings as an Ark of the Covenant supported on a wagon which proceeds slowly up Greenhill and finally downward to Kingsbere, the ancestral home of the d'Urbervilles. (p. 460) Throughout Tess's odyssey of life the vale represents home and the uplands alienation and hardship. Marlott, her childhood home, is located in Blackmoor

Vale where the atmosphere is "languorous and azure" (p. 10), the landscape picturesque and the country fertile and sheltered. When Tess arrives at the valley of the great dairies, she knows she has never visited this part of the country, but she feels strangely at home in the landscape as if she belonged here(as indeed she does). Wellbridge, the ancient d'Urberville home to which Clare romantically takes Tess on their honeymoon is located farther into the same Froom Valley (p. 276) and Kingsbere, the burial place of the d'Urberville line, is just beneath the hill that Tess and her family ascend after leaving their family home at Marlott. (p. 410) The Vicarage of Emmister, Clare's home, is located in a basin (p. 379), but Tess does not find a home in the bosom of Angel's family, the irony being that the elder Mr. Clare and his wife are at this point disposed to receive her, but Tess does not recognize the home-potential of this particular vale.

The garish Trantbridge house of Alec d'Urberville is built on an elevation of The Chase high enough to be seen above the dense evergreens. (p. 42) Flintcomb-Ash, where the starved and tragic polar birds come to preside over Tess's hardest physical labors, is on a barren upland. Though Tess first witnesses Alec's "conversion" in the lowlands, he overtakes her on Long-Ash Lane where "the long road ascend/s/ whitely to the upland . . . its dry pale surface stretching severely onward, unbroken by a single figure, vehicle, or mark, save some occasional brown horse-droppings which dotted its cold aridity here and there" (p. 391) and forces her confession not to tempt him at "Cross-in-Hand," "of all spots on the bleached and desolate upland . . . the most forlorn." (p. 396)

Tess's flight ends at Stonehenge, on an elevated plain that is visible for miles around. (p. 502) The vale has consistently offered Tess home, productive nature, a resting place--the hill represents alienation from home, hardship and finally death. Admittedly the vale has not been always pleasant for Tess (for example, the misery of the little Durbeyfields as young souls in the Durbeyfield ship at Marlott or Tess lying on the burial vault at Kingsbere so weary that she longs to be on the other side of the door) but it does consistently represent home, the absence of the alienation of a foreign land in which Tess does not belong, in which she is but a sojourner. At Stonehenge when the odyssey of her life is over, Tess can say of the upland plain, "I like very much to be here" and "So now I am at home." (p. 502) She has voluntarily exchanged life for death, the fertile vale for the stone altar.

The role of the earth image is, to say the least, confusing in Tess. In earlier Hardy fiction it is comparatively easy to recognize nature as pathetic fallacy, as enemy to man or as fellow sufferer with man, but in this novel nature seems to be discordant and confused. For example, Hardy quarrels with pantheistic "Nature's holy plan" (p. 24), but he seems to develop an almost-pantheistic affinity between Tess and all nature. The month after Tess's seduction a "sad October" matches her sad feeling, but later at Talbothay's dairy where nature seems to be so in accord with Tess, the evening sun looks "like a great inflamed wound against the sky." (p. 173) Seemingly, as Dorothy Van Ghent has pointed out, the earth itself participates in Tess's

tragedy by the isolation of the Chase, the distance of the country roads, the hardship of life at Flintcomb-Ash.[38] But Hardy is quick to inform that Tess is not really alienated from cruel nature by her "sin"; she is still very much a part of nature. Nature, on the other hand, is manifestly indifferent to Tess's loss of virginity. "Meanwhile the trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever. The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain." (p. 115) How can Hardy portray a nature that is occasionally sympathetic and occasionally indifferent, sometimes destructive and sometimes rejuvenating, at times good because it is natural and at other times evil because it hurts, maims and destroys? The question may be partially answered by a recognition that a given writer is not at all times one thing to the exclusion of everything else; nor is nature always one thing. Hardy objected to being called a pessimist, not so much because his outlook was gloomy as his rebellion against being stereotyped in a given mold of one systematic branch of philosophy. What is to prevent a man of such divergent interests using different types of metaphorical language or different aspects of the earth image so long as he does not contradict himself? In The Woodlanders, for example, the natural descriptions are poetic in their descriptive beauty, romantic in the use of metaphor, pessimistic in their exhibition of the terror and disease of nature and man, and naturalistic in their admission that there is little hope for improvement in the conditions of either man or nature.

Turning to Tess one observes that the human inhabitants,

[38]Van Ghent, p. 54.

especially Tess, are placed upon the anatomy of a giant figure which is the earth. Clare recognizes the relationship of Tess to the earth mother by comparing her in allusion to Artemis and Demeter, goddesses connected with the reproduction and the survival of living things--animal and vegetative. But there are within the "nature" of Tess two forces in constant conflict--the drive for survival and the drive toward death. In the verdant lowland contrasted to the barren hillside, the warm suns opposing bitter colds and rains that cut like splinters driven into the skin, the "pale and blasted nettle-stems of the preceding year . . . linger/ing/ nakedly in the banks, young green nettles of the present spring growing from their roots" (p. 475) these two forces are symbolized in exterior nature. Nature can well be at once both living and decaying, harmful and helpful, pleasant and painful. But Nature cannot be blamed for her different moods or her opposing drives; such forces are necessary tools of the "President of the Immortals" in preservation of life on this "blighted planet."

The two opposing drives are apparent in man too--or in <u>human</u> nature. In describing Tess's remarkably difficult life at Flintcomb-Ash, Hardy explains the forces as "the inherent will to enjoy, and the circumstantial will against enjoyment." (p. 365) These two "wills" correspond to Freud's <u>eros</u> and <u>thanatos</u> and are evident throughout the novel. Tess's fecundity and the birth of her child are nature's ordinary method of reproducing itself. It is "cruel Nature's law" that Angel and Tess love each other (p. 187) and the "slyness of Dame Nature" (p. 311) that hoodwinks Tess in trusting Clare. It is also only natural that the other milkmaids

fall in love with Angel and suffer loss; natural that Alec be "maddened" by Tess's gaze and become enslaved by his passion. When Tess dramatically cries out to Alec to slay her, the "once-victim, always victim" statement is a recognition of nature's law--the law that decrees that one creature be the predator and another the prey. And finally Tess's wish for death after her few brief moments of happiness with Angel is just as "natural" as the resurgence of youthful spirit that operates within her at Talbothays.

Considering all the universe to be composed of two differing forces can explain that nature offers sometimes shelter and at other times exposure to danger, salvation to some and irremediable loss to others. For universal nature is controlled by the same forces that control both human nature and the nature of the small birds and rabbits of Blackmoor Vale. Hardy's novel is a spirited cry against the unfairness of such a universe but a recognition at the same time that such things must be. It is nature's law.

The only thing that separates man from the creature is that man is endowed with a spirit, a soul. Without it there could be no tragedy, and because it exists, Tess's story is more than ballad or folk lore. It is a tragic account of the inevitability of human suffering, of the potential strength of the sufferer and of the ennobling of the human spirit through anguish. Tess's final reunion with the cruel Alec is more than just a physical surrender. If it were only that, Tess could not be a "pure" woman. Just as the pheasants are hunted and shot by their pursuers, Tess's geographical location is constantly traced by Alec. But

this is not what causes her to become his mistress. It is rather that her spirit has been hunted, cornered and caught in a snare, and spiritually she has no place to turn. Having placed her spiritual faith in Angel Clare and having found that her "god" has deserted her, she really has no choice. The trap has sprung and her essence, her soul, her very being, is trapped inside. It is precisely because of Tess's soul and because she has suffered with humility that Hardy can call his novel the account of "a pure woman faithfully presented." The meliorism of the joined hands of Clare and Liza-Lu counts for little because the cycle of suffering may well begin over to be re-enacted by others of Tess's fellow human creatures; the hope that counts in Tess of the D'Urbervilles is that a world, indeed a universe, that can produce a Tess cannot be all bad.

CONCLUSION

Ian Gregor has aptly called Jude the Obscure "a map of the heart rather than of Wessex."[39] Because Jude moves in the haunts of men--the cities, the universities, the bars and churches--Hardy has little use for the typically rural Wessex he had used so effectively in earlier novels. In Jude Hardy evidently felt he had a point to make and that the message was of such importance that he could not afford the luxury of words spent in rustic humor, quaint country customs and the rural atmosphere that had become an integral part of the Wessex novels. The point or theme of Jude the Obscure is a synthesis of the ideas that perplexed, interested or troubled Hardy before--the marriage and divorce laws with which he had quarreled in The Woodlanders, the Shelleyan love theme of adoration of an "ideality" that had concerned Fitzpiers in The Woodlanders and obsessed Pierston in The Well-Beloved, and the acknowledgement that "Nature's law /is/ mutual butchery"[40] as it had been in the later, more bitter novels, particularly Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

The major weakness of Jude the Obscure as tragedy is that it does not adequately fit Hardy's own definition of the "Worthy encompassed by the Inevitable." Jude rings true as a torn man

[39]Gregor, p. 307.

[40]Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York and London, 1923), p. 371.

in a troubled modern world; he anticipates the Willie Loman-type of more recent literary art. But neither he nor Sue inspires the reader to admire in the sufferer the remarkable strength of character that Henchard and Tess had exhibited. In fact, Hardy calls them "children" as he watches over them benignly; but he admits too in the term their lack of maturity in dealing with the oppressive problems of the real world. Jude's pathetic weakness is evident in more than his enslavement to physical lust and his weakness for drink (though these two character faults conspire in his undoing at least as much as chance or circumstance); it is Jude's inability ever to mature through suffering that prevents the novel's attaining the heights of tragedy. At the end of the novel when Christminster has betrayed her most loving child, Jude still returns to the city with a dream that he can at least participate in the same intellectual atmosphere as the great theologians and thinkers if he can not join their ranks. Even Arabella recognizes the pathetic quality of Jude's vision in her comment about the "ruling passion" of Jude's life, "Still harping on Christminster." (p. 376) One can certainly pity Jude and Sue in their sorrows (only a very callous person could refuse to care), but the obscure Jude simply does not capture and hold the reader's heart as had the obscure Tess.

The major philosophic statement of Jude is voiced in the comment of Phillotson, "Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would." (p. 384) It is noted again in Hardy's comment on Jude's sorrows and his wish not to live even in his childhood: "But nobody did come, because nobody

does." (p. 32) Arthur Mizener summarizes the prominent theme of Jude as not so much a tragedy as a contrast of the "permanently squalid real life of man with the ideal life."[41] Frederick McDowell insists that the theme is modern restlessness as evidenced by the Quixote and Dick Whittington allusions.[42] In Jude the student of Hardy realizes less hope than in any of the other novels, because in this final novel man is hopelessly enslaved by his own passions (his own human nature), the cruel laws of organized society, established religion, and the indifference of the universe. Jude the Obscure doesn't leave even the hope of Tess's conclusion with the joined hands of the heroine's sister and husband and the memory of a pure soul. Jude leaves the reader with the picture of a corpse of an obscure, plodding idealist who in almost every measure of judgment has been a failure, a memory of four small children who have died tragically, a "creed-drunk" Sue who has returned to her repulsive husband to punish herself in some mistaken idea that it will earn her forgiveness in God's eyes, and Arabella, the coarse, sensual and bestial female uttering in philosophic tones the failure of anyone to find peace while on this side of the grave. In his 1912 Preface Hardy explains that he hoped that "certain cathartic, Aristotelian qualities" might be found in Jude. It is certainly not acceptable criticism for one writer to judge the emotional

[41]Arthur Mizener, "Jude the Obscure as Tragedy," Southern Review VI (Summer 1940), p. 213.

[42]Frederick McDowell, "Hardy's Seemings or Personal Impressions: The Symbolic Use of Image and Contrast in Jude the Obscure," Modern Fiction Studies VI (Autumn 1960), p. 247.

reactions of all people to a given work of art; the novel may arouse a cathartic response in some readers. For many it does not. Hardy's final novel may well be a book "fifty years ahead of its time" as Sue and Jude claim their living experiment to have been; in his lifetime Hardy felt the novel to have had only one effect--"completely curing me of further interest in novel-writing." (1912 Preface)

Jude is not without its own pattern of symbolism. "Mournful winds" and "dense white fog" accompany the most sorrowful events in the lives of Jude and Sue, and exposure to a winter rain advances Jude's fatal illness, as it had done for other Hardy heroes. Animal imagery and personifications establish a symbolic importance of connection with human characteristics--the pig that Jude's tender heart prompts him to slay mercifully, the two pigeons that Sue sets free knowing that the poulterer will probably catch and kill them, the rabbit caught in a trap, the pig's pizzle with which Arabella attracts Jude's attention and which he returns to her as symbol of his submission. But more obvious is the symbolism of culture and civilization--the walls that keep Jude outside his desired goals (the church, Christminster, Sue, the university, even a place of lodging the night before Father Time's suicide), the windows and casements at which crucial meetings and conversations take place, the reflections of lights in the "new Jerusalem" of Christminster (an ironic treatment of the Christian hope).

The most interesting type of symbol and allusion in Hardy's "agnostic" and naturalistic novel is Biblically-inspired--the sack-cloth garment as symbol of remorse, the torments of Jude

likened to the unreasonable sufferings of Job ("Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived" p. 488), the picture of Samson shorn by Delilah that hangs in the bar Jude visits with Arabella and symbolizes his ruin at her hands, and most ironic of all, Jude's penchant for quoting St. Paul, the unmarried ascetic whose deportment was exactly opposite Jude's. (For example, the "neither length nor breadth, nor things present nor things to come" which could not separate Paul from the love of God is the same expression that Jude uses to explain his love for Sue--an ironic application of the divine to the profane.)

Jude's little son says at the Agricultural Fair that he could perhaps enjoy flowers were he not constantly aware that they wither in a few days. In Jude the Obscure it is natural for all things to wither and die. The "First Cause" is now acting in a more pessimistic pattern than it was in even The Woodlanders and Tess. The message is the coming of a "universal wish not to live" that little Father Time's life has symbolized. (p. 406) There is little faith in meliorism; the only good thing that is attained within the pages of Jude the Obscure is an education of the nature of the cosmos. Jude becomes educated in the novel; Thomas Hardy has known for some time the cruelty of the universe.

From A Pair of Blue Eyes to Jude the Obscure this study has attempted to expose and consider the developing philosophy of Hardy's naturalism and cosmic irony in terms of imagery and symbol. The thesis has devoted itself to the novels exclusively; there is unquestionably material for much thought within the pages of the

major fiction. But any student of Hardy cannot be unaware of the poetry in which Hardy distills the same ideas that permeate the great novels. In "Hap," one of the most famous poetic statements of his philosophy, Hardy expresses the same feeling he has implied in the major fiction.

> If but some vengeful god would call to me
> From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,
> Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
> That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"
>
> Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
> Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
> Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
> Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.
>
> But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
> And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
> --Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
> And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan . . .
> These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
> Blisses around my pilgrimage as pain.

Sue, in Jude the Obscure, is the person who can bear it, clench herself and die, knowing that a "Powerfuller" than she has willed in vengeance that she suffer. But Jude, like Hardy, realizes that it is not so. There is no all-powerful god, either providential or wrathful, who manipulates the universe in a meaningful direction. All is chance, circumstance, the operation of a universal will that has neither feeling nor sympathy, method nor direction, hope nor joy. It is Hardy's view that such "purblind Doomsters" shape men's lives that makes the course of his fiction so dismal.

J. H. Miller claims that it is inexact to speak of the philosophy of Hardy's youth and that of his age; that any study of this writer's ideas must take into account that they are not all that different at differing stages in his life, but rather that

there is in the writings an evolution or gradual clarification of things that Hardy already felt or believed.[43] When one realizes that "Hap" is dated 1866 and that it preceded the greatest fiction, it is obvious that Miller's statement has merit. Jude the Obscure differs from A Pair of Blue Eyes more in the degree of intensity with which the ideas are expressed than in basic ideas of the nature of man and the universe. Perhaps too Hardy became more outspoken as he grew older and his reputation more established. Perhaps he had witnessed more of a life that seemed to confirm the worst he had always expected of existence. Whatever the cause, the difference in degree of naturalism is markedly more pessimistic in the final fiction than in the earlier works and the writer is more bitter.

Though Hardy's use of the natural symbol or earth image is a method of establishing the cruelty, the occasional sympathy, the fickle habits and the frequent indifference of nature, Hardy is not in any of the fiction embittered by nature herself. Rather he communicates in his descriptions of the heath, the slow rivers, the fertile valleys and formidable woodlands of Wessex a rare feeling of kinship. In a sense all are related to the earth; she is the mother of us all. Henchard, Tess, Clym, Gabriel Oak, Winterborne--all feel an intimacy with the natural order in all its moods, its beautiful and grotesque scenes, its peaceful or angry aspect. It is because Thomas Hardy also felt this close intimacy that he has recorded the splendors of rural Wessex as one of English literature's most famous of natural settings.

[43]Miller, p. ix.

By the time one comes to the end of the Hardy novels, he realizes that nature is, after all, not as antagonistic to man as it had frequently appeared to be in the early fiction. The natural order is moved by a higher power, a non-personal, unfeeling, non-intellectual, mechanistic force that works "automatically like a somnambulist" (Jude the Obscure, p. 413) to move man, nature and the universe indiscriminately. One critic explains that in Hardy's view, each man "remains free until his death, but when the moment of retrospective illumination comes for him, he sees that he has all along been the victim of an unconscious power which has used his free acts as part of the irresistible forward movement which hurries him on, keeping him from fulfilling his intentions and from attaining any desirable life."[44] The characters in the great fiction feel themselves propelled by a sinister intelligence; to Hardy perhaps the form is not as personal and individual as the characters believe (in Jude there is only reference to this "First Cause"), but it shapes men's lives nevertheless, and the naturalism is just as pronounced as if the motivater were an individual god. The important contribution of his art is that Hardy perceived what to him was a cruel universe, that he cared about its blows wielded on poor, wretched mankind and that he dealt with his agnosticism and pessimism honestly. This view has been best summarized in the sensitive criticism of Lord David Cecil. "But he can only be respected for the honesty which compelled him to accept a philosophy of the universe so repugnant to the deepest instincts of his heart."[45]

[44]Miller, p. 203.

[45]Cecil, p. 223.

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(The definitive edition of Thomas Hardy's novels is Macmillan's Wessex Edition; Harper and Brothers' Franklin Square Press is Hardy's authoritative text in American publication. Harper and Brothers (New York and London) was used for this thesis whenever available. Substitutions were made in four cases: The Woodlanders, Two on a Tower, The Return of the Native (Norton Critical Anthology authoritative text) and The Mayor of Casterbridge (Riverside Editions paperback).

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