

THOMAS HARDY AND THE AESTHETICS OF REGIONALISM

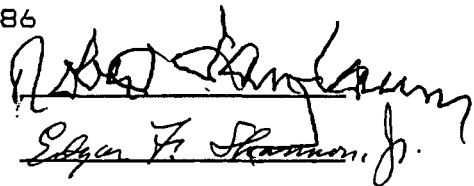
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Abstract

Thomas Hardy believed that the regional character of his work, far from limiting its universality, actually made it profoundly universal. This study of four novels (Under the Greenwood Tree, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, Tess of the D'Urbervilles) and selected poems strips away much of the local color and social realism and finds the symbol for Hardy's regionalism in the venerable country dance, the archetype of what he calls, in The Return of the Native, "the commonwealth of hearts and hands." The festive dance of couples around a bonfire on Guy Fawkes' Day, under a greenwood tree on a couple's wedding day, upon a village green on May Day becomes, in Hardy's novels, a metaphor for fertile domesticity and communal work and, ultimately (in his poetry), for the transcendental order that a "maid and her wight" can create when they enact the quintessential regional drama of making a home out of wilderness. Their frequent failure at "homemaking" follows from an unresolved, typically modern conflict between their natural and enlightened selves. Through Hardy's prescient depiction of that wilderness as a Freudian dreamscape as well as a Darwinian landscape, the regional drama becomes universal.

To Ashley

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Preface: In Search of a Usable Past

I

This study of Thomas Hardy aims to be not only an examination of four novels and selected poems but also an inquiry into regionalism. Allusions to other regional writers--particularly to the Southern Agrarians--pepper the five chapters and contribute to that aim. After all, it was a unique, self-consciously regional movement that gave birth in Nashville, Tennessee, to the Fugitive (1922-25), a poetry journal, and inspired the subsequent participation of the four most prominent Fugitives (John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren) in the Agrarian symposium I'll Take My Stand (1930). Moreover, they all seem to have seen Hardy, despite his liberalism and religious skepticism, as an exemplar. Warren (along with Cleanth Brooks) edited in 1940, the centennial anniversary of Hardy's birth, a commemorative issue of the Southern Review; and Ransom, Tate, and Davidson all wrote appreciatively of Hardy when his stock was low. The distinctive treatment of regional material by Ransom, Tate, and Davidson in their poems evidently determined each man's equally distinctive response in essays to Hardy, so that Hardy's regionalism almost seems a composite of theirs.

As a term, "regionalism" connotes a literature set in a remote and backward place and imbued with local color, which sophisticated readers find quaint and sometimes shocking. But as Davidson declares in The Attack on Leviathan, "This regionalism is generally nothing more than a simplified and condescending urban idea of regional culture." He quotes approvingly Tate, who "defined regionalism as 'the immediate, organic sense of life in which a fine artist works,' and distinguished this regionalism which is the voice of genuine tradition, from the regionalism which is merely documentary, antiquarian, or picturesque" (82-3).

Hardy, defensive about the "circumscribed scene" of his works, describes (in the "General Preface" to the Wessex Edition of 1912) his characters as "beings in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal." The Agrarians appear equally anxious to stress the universality of their regionalism. According to Davidson; for example, the Agrarians, "[l]ike their predecessors of several past generations in England and America, . . . were engaged in the search for a 'usable past' which had troubled Western art since the beginning of the Renaissance . . . [which] itself began with the selfconscious recovery of the Greek Tradition" (Leviathan 84). For the regional artist the usable past inheres in

"that consciousness," as Tate puts it in an alternative definition of "regionalism," "or that habit of men in a given locality which influences them to certain patterns of thought and conduct handed to them by their ancestors" (Essays of Four Decades 539). Inspired by assaults on that consciousness by what Davidson terms an "imperious cosmopolitanism" (80), which has included at least since Hardy's day a "machine economy" (for Ransom the enemy of regional life), regional literature dramatizes the conflict between tradition and, in Hardy's phrase, the "irrepressible New" (The Return of the Native 1.1).

While Davidson argues that regionalism in the arts is "only one phase [the selfconscious phase] of a general movement of revulsion and affirmation" (Leviathan 80), regional art is seldom if ever the mere expression of an artist's nostalgic affirmation of tradition; it is the expression of "an ambivalent point of view," such as Tate perceives in Hardy, which "is at the center of an ironic consciousness" (Essays 333-4)--a characteristic acquired by Southern writers when "the South not only reentered the world with the first World War [but also] . . . looked round and saw . . . that the Yankees were not to blame for everything" (Essays 592).

II

For Hardy, according to Ransom (in his introduction to Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy), the dialectic between modernity and tradition pits "Science" against "Faith." Ransom maintains that only Hardy's "conscientious objection to reciting the belief that God interposes in the execution of the natural laws by the faithful Subalterns" (who are, in Hardy's poem "The Subalterns," a "leaden sky," the frozen "North," "Sickness," and "Death") deters him from returning to his childhood faith in an active, inscrutable God. Thus, as Ransom surmises, Hardy attributes the occasional, apparent malevolence of this God to the "Spirit of Irony"--a maneuver that smacks of "indecision" and testifies to Hardy's susceptibility to the "Spirit of Pity," but that saves him from having "to embrace Science and go without Faith" (xxiv). "[W]hat [Ransom] wants to do" in his own poetry, as Donald Davie has complained in Thomas Hardy and British Poetry, "is to take over Hardy's irony while dispensing with Hardy's pity" (32-3).

Ransom, whose dialectic between Science and Faith sets industrialism against agrarianism, insists on seeing Hardy the ironist as a possible, if hesitant, ally in his campaign--formally launched in God without Thunder (1930)--to restore, as Warren explains it, the "unreasonable" God

of the Old Testament, "the author of evil as well as good," in order to counter "the myth of rationality . . . called industrialism" ("John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony" 27-9). Yet Ransom's irony, like Hardy's, sometimes masks a rather sentimental agrarianism, whose presiding spirit is Pity--the spirit that Hardy's faith, as Ransom refuses to see, allies with Science: as Davie insists, "to the scientific humanist, who pins his faith as Hardy did on 'loving-kindness operating through scientific knowledge,' irony can never have more than a subordinate place in the moral economy. And indeed in those words," which Davie is quoting from Hardy's "Apology" to his Late Lyrics and Earlier, "Hardy declared that for him the Spirit of Pity, not Irony, would always have the last word" (32-3).

So, too, does Pity have the last word in Ransom's "Antique Harvesters," his most explicitly regional poem (Selected Poems 83-4). While the Spirit of Irony provides the realistic description of the land, whose harvest yields only "[a] meager hill of kernels, a runnel of juice," and the satirical description of some fox-hunters, quixotic "archetypes of chivalry," who appear on the scene, the Spirit of Pity presides over the harvest itself. The old are preciously "antique." The labor is a sacred rite: "Therefore let us assemble," a priestly harvester commands his brethren--they do so as a "choir" and "garner" for the

"Lady" (an apotheosis of the South) a "treasure" of "full bronze." Through this rite the "dainty youths" may come to know their "famous Lady's image." By working the land, they perpetuate the myth that in turn sustains them. It is true that "the ribs of the earth subsist frail as a breath / If but God wearieth"; but the speaker of the poem, who now addresses the youths, is far from warning them that God may weary, despite the omen of increasingly meager harvests.

Tate, the most cosmopolitan of the Fugitive poets, detects Hardy's responsiveness to scientific knowledge. Tate shrewdly identifies Hardy with Clym Yeobright (whose "philosophical reading" makes him "an outsider in his own region") and credits Hardy with "a somewhat greater belief in one of the leading Victorian ideas, Progress, than is usually attributed to [him]" (Essays 333-4). Tate might have concluded, though he does not do so explicitly, that Hardy's ambivalent point of view, like his own, complicates the regionalist's search for a usable past.

When Tate turns his eyes to the "immoderate past," he sees in "Ode to the Confederate Dead" an "inscrutable infantry rising / Demons out of the earth . . . / Stonewall, Stonewall, and the sunken fields of hemp, / Shiloh, Antietam, Malvern Hill, Bull Run" (Collected Poems

20-3). This romantic vision quickly yields, however, to a naturalistic one: "leaves / Flying, plunge and expire." As Tate has written, "it is a commentary on our age that the man at the gate [who meditates the poem] never quite achieves the illusion that the leaves are heroic men, so that he may identify himself with them, as Keats and Shelley too easily and too beautifully did with nightingales and west winds" (Essays 599).

If "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode to the West Wind" are obvious points of reference, the image here of a man standing alone at a gate in a November twilight also calls to mind the scene in Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush," where another man, at dusk in December, leans "upon a coppice gate." (Hardy's poem also contends with the two earlier, Romantic odes.) Neither poet, grounded, as it were, by scientific revelations, can attain a transcendent vision such as natural phenomena inspired in the Romantic poets. Davidson asks Tate in a letter, "Where, O Allen Tate, are the dead? You have buried them completely out of sight." He might well have addressed that question to Hardy. "The Darkling Thrush" is a hymn to the Romantic dead, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats (whose poems echo in "The Darkling Thrush"); but it is most of all an elegy, as Davidson characterizes Tate's ode, for the poet's "own dead emotion" (Literary Correspondence 186-7). The "knowledge"

that served in earlier times as the basis for an "active faith" (Essays 600) and that the speaker of the ode has "carried to the heart" cannot overcome, in Davidson's words, "the kind of knowledge [scientific knowledge] that accomplishes material results" (Still Rebels 174). For Tate a usable past remains elusive: "our past," he insists "is buried so deep that it is all but irrecoverable" (Literary Correspondence 183).

Davidson, who seems to have possessed nothing of Tate's ironic consciousness, displays no awareness of Hardy's. While Davidson misses the mark when he asserts that Hardy "accepts the assumptions of the society that he depicts" (58), he accurately notes the "folk" quality of Hardy's novels. In "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction," he argues persuasively "that the characteristic Hardy novel is conceived as a told (or sung) story, or at least not as a literary story; that it is an extension, in the form of a modern prose fiction, of a traditional ballad or an oral tale . . . but, furthermore, that his habit of mind is a rather unconscious element in Hardy's art" (Still Rebels 49-50).

Davidson, who maintains (in The Attack on Leviathan) that regionalism in the arts--though "it [is] not merely folklore"--does rest upon "folkways" (95), celebrates in

his poems the folk heritage of his region and finds therein a usable past. Dedicated to "that far-off sire," an immigrant from Scotland, "Who notched the first oak on this western hill," Davidson's poem "Hermitage" recounts the poet's pilgrimage to the site of his ancestral home on Chestnut Ridge in Tennessee (Poems 68-70). If Tate had written the poem, the sire who made "the Virginian voyage" would be an Aeneas, who brought to "the reduction of uncitied littorals" (as Tate puts it in "Aeneas at Washington" [68]) a European, classical tradition--and later lost his "active faith" in it. For Davidson the arrival of that "man of flints and pelts, / Alert with gun and axe," means the genesis of folk tradition. It is less a pilgrimage on foot than a "hearthside tale [in which] his rumor grows / As voice to voice into the folk-chain melts" that leads the poet to his "far-off sire."

Davidson's quest for a usable past takes him, in this poem, into a primitive past far removed from the traditional ante-bellum South, personified as a Lady by Ransom and embodied for Tate by Aeneas-as-Southern gentleman. Having fled "the moody kings" (who appropriated to the institution of the monarchy the authority of established religion), the pioneer discovered pagan deities; he obeyed the totemic "Buffalo Gods" who "bid lay down . . . / The sill and hearthstone of our destiny." The

"graybeard," as Davidson imagines him, explains that here "some strange bird-or-beast word named me new."

Spoken by a descendant of that "graybeard," another poem ("Sanctuary") reveals more of the folk tradition associated with the settling of the wilderness (Poems 71-3). In this poem a father is giving his son directions to "the secret refuge of our race" to which he can retreat if ever "defeat is black / Upon your eyelids." Although the speaker itemizes the provisions that his son should take-- "A little corn for an ash-cake, a little / Side-meat . . . / Horses for your women and your children, / And one to lead"--all of which appear to date the poem, it is possible that they simply belong to the directions themselves, which have come down to the speaker from earlier generations. It seems at first that the defeat to which he refers is that by Yankees. In fact, the foe--defined simply by his lack of access to the wilderness--is deracinated modern man ignorant of his folk tradition. The father, who speaks of paths that "were your fathers' paths, and once were mine," knows them still because the tales survive. Despite the specificity of his directions to his son (which mention, for example, a "white-oak tree beside a spring, the one / Chopped with three blazes on the hillward side"), the wilderness itself seems to owe its existence less to vivid, physical attributes than to the telling: "This is the

secret refuge of our race / Told only from a father to his son." Here, as if in some magical realm, the son will meet his kin, "long there before you"; here he may watch

The last wild eagle soar or the last raven
 Cherish his brood within their rocky nest,
 Or see, when mountain shadows first grow long,
 The last enchanted white deer come to drink.

III

Davidson, whose usable past proves durable because it reaches beyond established religious and social institutions and into primitive mythology, seems to have believed that Hardy similarly directed his characters to that sanctuary. Indeed, Hardy does provide an opportunity for his self-conscious, modern men and women to discover, often by way of the "folk-chain" (which takes in Hardy's novels the form of a country dance), "a locus, physical and spiritual, in which association might replace dissociation." (These are Davidson's words, which suggest the efficacy of regionalism [Leviathan 86].) Nevertheless, the example of one of Davidson's students at Vanderbilt, James Dickey, provides a more accurate gauge of the depth of Hardy's wilderness--the "wilderness" in which, as D. H. Lawrence maintains, Hardy's characters find themselves,

"having left the walled security, and the comparative imprisonment, of the established conventions" (Phoenix 411). Here Dickey's personae, characteristically a "middle-aged, softening man" (as in "Springer Mountain"), run with the animals rather than keep house (Poems 130-3). For Hardy regionalism is the drama of man's attempt to make a home out of that wilderness--a wilderness that deepens as his early pastoral vision yields to the realization that riotous, psychological terrain underlies the fields that man must cultivate.

Dickey seems to have followed the directions of the father who addresses his son in "Sanctuary"--"go to the wilderness / In the dread last of trouble." The defeat that threatens Dickey's personae is often analogous to defeat by Davidson's "Yankees." Industry, the invader from the North, which has spawned the urban society and suburbs where Dickey's characters typically live stultifying lives, has subjected even art to its "Leviathanism." As Dickey puts it in "Chenille," this new "art" is "made by machine / From a sanctioned, unholy pattern / Rigid with industry" (Poems 119). Although the poet is referring here specifically to the woven animals on chenille bedspreads, the analogy extends to poetry. What Dickey craves is "the freedom to strike without warning"--the freedom, for example, given to snakes by a wilderness of kudzu (Poems

140-2). In his poem "Kudzu," set in Georgia (where "the legend says / That you must close your windows // At night to keep it out of the house"), the vine takes over "your" pasture as you sleep, and with that invasion come snakes indistinguishable from tendrils. Eventually, hogs are brought in to eradicate the snakes, and with cold weather the kudzu itself "turns / Black, withers inward and dies." It is, of course, a victory for the farmer. Yet just as the kudzu lent, for a while, a special freedom to the snakes, the snakes imparted a similar power to him:

(It was as though you had
 A green sword twined among
 The veins of your growing right arm--
 Such strength as you would not believe
 If you stood alone in a proper
 Shaved field among your safe cows--):
 Came in through your closed

 Leafy windows and almighty sleep
 And prospered, till rooted out.

By entering this dreamscape, the farmer found himself liberated from the propriety that made his waking hours safe.

In other of Dickey's poems a similar promise of creative emancipation lures the poet into the wilderness

where, as Davidson points out in "Sanctuary," "Men have found / Images carved in bird-shapes . . . and faces / Moulded into the great kind look of gods." Dickey's nocturnal explorations of the wilderness are possible because of his willingness to "throw obsessive gentility off"--to reject defiantly the mythic old South, and demand (in "Slave Quarters") that Africa, home of slaves, "rise upon me like a man / Whose instincts are delivered from their chains"--an Africa whose "beasts" become "For the white man the animals of Eden / Emblems of sexual treasure" (Poems 234-9). Such quests for a usable past are analogous to dreams in that the narrator's "regressive passions and phantasies" (in Freud's words) find expression there in what amounts to a return to the instinctual life of primitive man who "[alt the level of totemism . . . has no repugnance to tracing his descent from an animal ancestor" and whose "gods take animal shapes" (Civilization and Its Discontents 5).¹

This wilderness experience also proves analogous to the writing of a poem. Take for example "A Dog Sleeping on My Feet" (Poems 55-6). A dog asleep on his feet (which

¹In Tate's nightmarish poem "The Wolves," a modern man, whose abstract mind has led him to brood on "angels" and "archfiends," finds himself sitting "where the next room's / Crowded with wolves" and learns, to his comfort, that mortal "man can never be alone" (54). Unlike Tate, whose characteristic persona is the gentlemanly Aeneas, Dickey pursues this theme obsessively, with animal relish.

have themselves gone to sleep), the poet, late at night in his suburban den, is writing a poem--one which, lacking an animal drive, has become too much a mechanical exercise. "Few now are left," as Davidson contends in a poem of his, "who know . . . / That tame abstract must wed the wild particular / In art" (7); and Dickey ranks among those few. Consequently, he "turn[s] the page / Of the notebook, carefully not // Remembering what I have written." The poet acquires, metaphorically, the feet of the sleeping dog, running in its dream in pursuit of a fox--"Before me the fox floats lightly, / On fire with his holy scent." Even though Dickey's fox appears as much a "lovely ritualist" as Ransom's in "Antique Harvesters," Dickey, in taking part in the fox-hunt, assumes the guise not of one of Ransom's "archetypes of chivalry" but rather of the dog. As he does in a different context in "Slave Quarters," he abandons the genteel Old South (whose traditional gentility Ransom can affirm even as he burlesques its devotees) as well as the suburban den; and he enters a co-existent, parallel, yet wilder dimension. Thus, when the poem ascends "through my pine-prickling legs / Out of the night wood . . . / And ends on the brightness of paper," and his hand "speaks in a daze / The hypnotized language of beasts," it seems that Davidson's "beast-word" has indeed named him new.

The epigraph to one of Dickey's poems, "The Strength of Fields," purports to describe the nocturnal experience of his characteristic personae: "a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power and a life-enhancing return." At the end of this poem, the speaker prays, "More kindness, dear Lord / Of the renewing green. . . . More kindness will do nothing less / Than save every sleeping one / And night-walking one // Of us" (The Central Motion 100-1). Yet rarely does Dickey dramatize that kindness, which for Hardy is true religion. The poems themselves are the sole fruit of the poet's separation from the world, the sole evidence of a life-enhancing return; and they seldom if ever reveal him absorbed, during his daylight hours, in social intercourse, let alone engaged in a saving act of kindness.

What form might this religious act take? Walker Percy's novel The Second Coming (1980) constructs an elaborate vision of the social transformation that can happen when human beings return to the wilderness and there become, in Hardy's phrase, "a commonwealth of hearts and hands" (The Return of the Native 1.7)--men and women bound not only by "external necessity," which (as Freud sees it) creates "the compulsion to work," but also by the even greater "power of love" (Civilization and Its Discontents

53). Set near Asheville, North Carolina, the novel has two main characters, Will Barrett and Allie Huger, both of whom are suffering from a sense of dislocation. A wealthy, middle-aged widower, Barrett as a young man fled his native South, intent on escaping its "secret love of death" (as embodied by his father, a suicide). He married a Yankee and practiced law on Wall Street. Back in his native region, still obsessed by his father's death, and suffering now from the petit mals of Hausmann's Syndrome--"It ought to be called Housman not Hausmann, . . . the disorder suffered by the poet who mourned dead Shropshire lads and rose-lipt maids and his own lost youth" (302)--Barrett remembers acutely everything in his apparently meaningless past. In contrast, Allie, a schizophrenic and recent escapee from a mental ward where she endured shock therapy, remembers little. Sleeping in an abandoned greenhouse built into a mountainside, she is a pioneer in both a natural and psychological wilderness.

A search for God (who exists, if at all, as Barrett discovers, in acts of loving-kindness) takes Barrett deep into a cave within the mountain and into a past more distant than his own. Lost Cove, which folklore has embraced, was once not only the refuge of Confederate soldiers during the Civil War but also the lair, 32,000 years ago, of saber-toothed tigers, whose petrified remains

were once discovered there. Barrett, who enters the cave through a hidden passage, cut by the rebel soldiers, moves back through regional history to prehistoric times. As Barrett, awaiting a spiritual revelation, lies within the mountain, his bed belongs less to those Confederate soldiers who sought refuge there than to those saber-toothed tigers which huddled there during the Ice Age. When his revelation comes in the banal guise of a toothache, violent nausea confronts him with his own ineluctable, mortal, animal self. This confrontation is the ultimate primitive experience. As Percy insists, "There is one sure cure for cosmic explorations, grandiose ideas about God, man, death, suicide, and such--and that is nausea. I defy a man afflicted with nausea to give a single thought to these vast subjects" (213).

For Barrett his separation from the world, in effect a death and burial, does result in a life-enhancing return. He eventually crawls from his "grave" inside the mountain and falls through another man-made hole in the rock (which allows cave-air, sixty degrees year-round, to cool the greenhouse in summer and warm it in winter) and into the arms of Allie, whose heroic effort, dependent solely on physical strength and native intelligence, to make the place a home has recently slackened. Allie has herself been searching lately, on paper, for love. Percy implies

(as does Hardy in his novels and poems) that "homemaking" cannot remain a solitary activity--it requires at least two hearts, two sets of hands. Soon the two of them begin anew the quintessential regional drama of making a home out of wilderness.

What is more, their "commonwealth of hearts and hands" is going to include other dislocated individuals. At the end of the novel Barrett enlists in their enterprise of building log cabins and other greenhouses on the mountain several old men (residents of an "old folks' home," endowed by Barrett's late wife)--one of whom once ran a nursery; the other two built houses. Each possesses expertise now lost in a crass, commercial South. Their accomplishment, the creation of an indigenous community, will be analogous to regional art.

It is true that Percy's Smoky Mountains seem far more accommodating than Eustacia Vye's Egdon Heath, which embodies nightmare, and even Bathsheba Everdeen's Weatherbury Farm. Still, the conclusion of The Second Coming exemplifies in an uncanny, programmatic way Hardy's conviction that "loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge" offers man his one sure hope of salvation.

The Personal Matrix and Under the Greenwood Tree

I

Born in 1840, Thomas Hardy grew up during a cultural crisis that eventually created an intimacy between rural backwaters and urban centers and thus spelled doom for a society characterized by self-sufficiency, isolation, and continuity. For the Hardys this new relationship between the country and the city involved Higher Bockhampton, a hamlet of eight houses including theirs, and Dorchester, the county town three miles away, which the railroad linked, in 1847, to London. The new prosperity that came to Dorchester brought to Hardy, as Robert Gittings observes in Young Thomas Hardy, "newspapers, magazines, books, bookshops, and a variety of opportunities in education" (21). It later seemed to Hardy that this linkage, which introduced "London comic songs" to Dorset, also brought death "at a stroke" to "the orally transmitted ditties of centuries" (Life 25). For Hardy, whose earliest memories included "the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes, and country-dances that his father played of an evening . . . and to which the boy danced a pas seul in the middle of the room," these ditties seemed the essence of regional culture (Life 19). The comparative cosmopolitanism of a modest urban center like Dorchester, where Hardy was able to go to

school, challenged his regional identity. Hardy's Wessex novels, beginning with Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), dramatize the cultural transition and explore the ways in which it complicated his generation's sense of self.

Hardy's family, like the Mellstock Quire in Under the Greenwood Tree, belonged to the social class of self-employed craftsmen and artisans, the main repository of folk tradition. His parents in fact responded to the social changes in ways that epitomized the options open to a disintegrating folk culture. Thomas Hardy senior, whose people "all had," according to his son, "the characteristics of an old family of spent social energies" (Life 9), exemplified the principle that a self-contained, traditional society tends to stagnate. A lazy man with little business sense, he inherited the trade of his father, a mason. It was Hardy's own perception that his father "did not possess the art of enriching himself by business" (Life 13). Gittings has challenged this view by pointing out that the elder Hardy died fairly prosperous. Hardy must have seen, however, that his father's prosperity, as well as his frequent financial reversals, resulted less from anything his father did himself than from events in nearby Dorchester. As Gittings observes, the influx of people into Dorchester, which accompanied the spread of industry, "brought building orders to Hardy's

father" (21). He apparently fulfilled his commissions conscientiously, but he seems never to have aggressively pursued the new opportunities that came with change. Instead, he entrusted the state of his business to the volatile economy of the county town. At work in his native hamlet, he personified the inertia of rural society.

"Local tradition," Gittings admits, "still puts down much of the elder Hardy's success to the driving force of his wife" (7). Unlike her passive husband, Jemima Hardy actively pursued, on her children's behalf, the opportunities that accompanied change. Extremely ambitious for her children, she transferred the ten-year-old Hardy, after a year at the parish school, to one of the many, more advanced schools in Dorchester. When he turned sixteen, she dickered with an architect there and saw Hardy apprenticed to him on terms affordable to the Hardys. In short, Jemima Hardy did all she could do to insure her son's escape, through education and professional training, from the precarious class to which his father belonged.

Class mobility was becoming more common. In addition to education and professional training, marriage was a third means of advancing socially. Despite her social ambitions for her children, Jemima Hardy, a paradoxical woman, exhibited a clannishness more intense than that which commonly discourages change in historically isolated

communities. A characteristic of the inhabitants of these communities, clannishness often becomes acute in a traditional society under siege, which sees the changelessness of its past (which it owes to cultural inbreeding) as the only defense against the disintegrating effects of change. Jemima Hardy's own clannishness was so intense as to be perverse. She gave birth to two sets of children--Thomas and Mary, who were little more than a year apart, and ten years later Henry and Kate, who came four years apart: it was their mother's wish that none of them marry but live with each other in pairs, thus maintaining, as Michael Millgate puts it in his biography of Hardy, "throughout life the unity and interdependence of their childhood" (21). The only one of the four to wed, Hardy was able, thanks to his education and professional training, to marry into the professional class. His marriage in 1874 to Emma Gifford, while it defied his mother's clannishness, testified to his social mobility, which had been the primary goal of Jemima Hardy's ambitions.

The five years from 1862 to 1867 that Hardy worked as an architect's assistant in London saw the uneasy accommodation of his ambitiousness to what Gittings calls his "intense familial sense" (64). While he showed no inclination to remain single, he focused his romantic

attentions on young women who hailed from his region: a first cousin whose family he had grown up near, and another woman whom he seems to have met on the Dorset coast, when she lived there as a girl. Meanwhile he was sharing an office, as Gittings points out, with the "public school men from the upper classes" who were pupils of his "fashionable" employer (57). Hardy was also indulging his intellectual curiosity at art museums, concerts, lectures, as well as at the Great Exhibition, whose opening in the summer of 1862 "perhaps influenced him in the choice of a date for his migration" to London (Life 40). Hardy's life of the mind brought with it religious skepticism, which distanced him further from his rural origins. It would be convenient to accept Gittings's hypothesis that Hardy's break with religion--his family was Church of England--owed much to a Shelleyan attachment to a young woman unconnected with either his family or his region (90-6). The evidence, however, is unconvincing. Whatever the cause, Hardy's "abandonment," in Gittings's words, "of the faith of his upbringing" was heretofore his most serious revolt against tradition (91).

Hardy's three-mile walk from Higher Bockhampton to school in Dorchester had linked for him the life of the mind with urban life. Self-conscious equally about his learning and about his rustic background, Hardy came more

and more to view his native rural region from the perspective of an urban outsider--even as he continued to see his home in Dorset as a refuge from teeming London, whose noxious air, in fact, soon made him ill. For Hardy this tension provoked a vision of a possibly bankrupt culture from which, paradoxically, he continued to draw sustenance and to which he would always remain nostalgically attached.

Ill health sent Hardy home to Bockhampton in 1867. On assignment with another architectural firm to Cornwall in 1870, he met Emma. Hardy's precipitous engagement to Emma, a young woman unconnected with Dorset, climaxed his escape from the restrictiveness of regional as well as family ties. Gittings implies, and poems like "I Found Her Out There" and "Beeny Cliff" confirm, that the spectacular and, to Hardy (who had never been to Cornwall), unfamiliar setting contributed much to the "magic" of the initial encounter--as did Emma's "masses of blonde hair" (125), which contrasted significantly with the dark hair of Hardy's female relations (114).

Only after almost ten rather nomadic years of marriage did he return for good to Dorset. The clannishness of Hardy's mother, which fostered in him a "familial sense" that made impossible a permanent escape from his rural origins, drew him home to Dorset, where he and Emma soon

settled into Max Gate, a house designed by Hardy. Even so, his social ambitions, also instilled in him by his mother, impelled him in the opposite direction, sending him each year thereafter to London for the "season." According to Gittings, he even called himself "half a Londoner" (Thomas Hardy's Later Years 43). In short, Hardy's professional status and social vanity led him to fancy that he belonged in London, while his origins, which he came to recognize as the source of his identity and the well-spring of his creativity, told him otherwise. Millgate, in his biography of Hardy, describes a generally "painless division between his social life, which was to a large extent professionally oriented, and that of family life on which, at the deepest emotional and creative levels, he so much depended" (265). But the tension experienced by educated and socially ambitious characters like Fancy Day, in Under the Greenwood Tree (which Hardy began soon after meeting Emma), and Bathsheba Everdeen, in Far from the Madding Crowd (which he completed shortly before their marriage in 1874), testifies instead to the aptness of Gittings's unflattering observation that Hardy kept aloof, after his return to Dorset, from his many socially obscure, working-class relatives and that during his annual visit to London he moved self-consciously among his professional equals and social superiors: "In the world of letters and of society,

he appeared withdrawn, a man nursing a secret. In the world of his Dorset upbringing, he appeared, except to his close family, as one who had deserted them" (Young Thomas Hardy 210). In essence, Hardy seems never to have been able to reconcile his professional and social aspirations with the fact of his relatively low birth.

Hardy's critique of rural society, in his Wessex novels, derives from this personal matrix. Fundamentally the novels offer a critique of the conflicting ways his family dealt with change, and they explore the potentially tragic effect of this conflict on the younger generation. By the time he wrote Under the Greenwood Tree (the first of his novels set in Wessex, a mythical area in southwest England consisting of six counties including his native Dorset), Hardy had already come to see that his father's inertia was at once the main characteristic and chief weakness of rural society. Leading to stagnation, inertia left one's fate to frequently unsympathetic outsiders.

Hardy's infatuation with Emma, which coincided with his writing of the novel, indicates that he also recognized the sterility of his mother's clannishness. He saw, in other words, that blind resistance to change (often the instinctive reaction of a static society to a challenge to its self-containment) led ultimately, as did inertia, to

stagnation. His romance with and eventual marriage to Emma promised to be fruitful, not only because there was the possibility (actually unrealized) of progeny, but also because the union seemed to satisfy his social and professional vanity. At the same time, Hardy found himself reluctantly admitting that despite his ambitions, his self-identity depended on his regional ties. In other words, he began to see the changefulness, a peculiarly modern condition from which he himself had benefited, as a threat to regional character--a threat with personal as well as social significance. Ironically, the marriages at the end of Under the Greenwood Tree and Far from the Madding Crowd, which involve couples already united by their regional identity, represent a compromise between clannishness and social vanity as Hardy's own marriage to a woman with no ties to Dorset did not. The novelist could resolve the tensions artistically even if he could not do so personally. (His second wife's family did hail from Dorset.)

Since Hardy saw the tensions within his own family as paradigmatic of those experienced by the region during a time of cultural transition, it is appropriate that the state of families in many of his novels reflects the state of society. Most of Hardy's main characters--Fancy and Bathsheba, for example--lack at least one parent and often

both, and these are the characters who struggle between two worlds, the traditional one of their past and the changeful modern one towards which their vanity inclines them. Their families are microcosms of a traditional society whose traditions are foundering. The young people find themselves adrift. By the time he wrote Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy seems to have begun to entertain the notion that the person who comprehended his uncertainty within both a rural and an urban setting, but acknowledged his fundamentally country nature, might salvage from the wreckage of traditions whatever of regional character had permanent value.

II

Completed in the summer of 1871, Under the Greenwood Tree, or The Mellstock Quire was Hardy's third novel, his second one to be published (in June of the following year). The reviewers who had complained about the over-intricate plot of Desperate Remedies (1871) now had before them a book whose subtitle, "A Rural Painting of the Dutch School," bespoke a simple construction. By critical consent, the country scenes in Desperate Remedies were the best; consequently, Under the Greenwood Tree became the first of Hardy's novels set entirely in his native region.

(He introduced the designation "Wessex" during the serialization of Far from the Madding Crowd in 1874). Mellstock parish corresponds to the novelist's own Stinsford parish.

Other details familiar to Hardy influenced the characterization. He denied that the Hardys were models for the Dewys, but it is hard not to see his mother in the outspoken Mrs. Dewy and his father, who had performed (along with Hardy's grandfather) in a choir, in the ineffectual "tranter" Dewy. Hardy also appears to have modeled Fancy after his cousin Tryphena Sparks, with whom he may have been romantically involved while writing the novel. Tryphena, whom Fancy resembles physically, had earned an education and become a teacher (Young Thomas Hardy 154). More important, Fancy's return, with an urban outlook, to her native countryside parallels the novelist's own predicament.

As an early, rather autobiographical novel, Under the Greenwood Tree is a surprisingly well-realized parable of the demise of a local tradition, represented by the Mellstock Quire, which the new, progressive vicar wants to replace with an organist. The competence of the choir is not an issue. Rather, it is because the vicar, Parson Maybole, "prefer[s] organ-music to any other . . . [and] consider[s] it most proper" that he "feel[s] justified in

endeavouring to introduce it" (Pt. 2, Ch. 4--numbers throughout refer to chapters). The introduction of the organ promises to do to the sacred music of Mellstock what the railroad does a decade later to the secular music of Dorchester. The choir's hymns, "orally transmitted from father to son down to the present characters" (1.4), are supplanted by the hymns in such "hymn-books as are popular in the churches of fashionable society" (Preface). At the center of the conflict between the traditional choir and the modern-minded vicar stands Fancy Day, the new school-mistress and the prospective organist, who becomes an object of romantic interest not only for Parson Maybole, but also for Farmer Shiner (who disdains the choir) and for Dick Dewy (who plays, if halfheartedly, in it).

The Mellstock Quire engenders, especially on Sundays, a sense of community among the parishioners. Since the fathers and brothers and husbands and sons of so many of the church-goers play or sing in the choir, the musical selections reflect the tastes of the whole congregation. By the time Hardy writes the preface to the 1896 edition of the novel, the conflict (set in the thirties) between similar rustic choirs and progressive parsons has long since played itself out; "an isolated organist"--isolated by lack of sympathy with the old traditions as well as by

physical location within the church--has replaced choirs throughout rural England. The deplorable result, according to Hardy, has been "to curtail and extinguish the interest of parishioners in church doings." He concludes, "an important union of interests has disappeared" (Preface).

From a society's union of interests derives its continuity, to which the participation in the choir of three generations of Dewys obviously testifies. For forty years the eldest Dewy, Grandfather William, has been leading a choir on such rounds of Christmas Eve caroling as open the novel. Moreover, the hymns are "ancient and time-worn" (1.4). Other traditional songs as well as the hymns connect this choir to earlier ones. Referring to the choir's "home-bound" music books, Hardy observes in the preface: "It was customary to inscribe a few jigs, reels, hornpipes, and ballads in the same book, by beginning it at the other end, the insertions being continued from front to back till sacred and secular met together in the middle." Composed of tradesmen and craftsmen, the choir is the repository of folk culture.

Mellstock is one of the last enclaves of folk tradition. As one of the players says during the rounds,

"I've been thinking we must be almost the last left in the county of the old string players? Barrel-organs, and the things next door to 'em

that you blow wi' your foot have come in terribly of late years." (1.4)

This significant observation places within a regional context the drama about to be enacted in Mellstock.

As the Mellstock Quire explains the dissolution of other choirs in Wessex, compromise with change dooms tradition. Referring to the new organs, the player continues:

"Time was--long and merry now!--when not one of the varmits was to be heard of; but it served some of the quires right. They should have stuck to strings as we did, and kept out clarinets, and done away with serpents. If you'd thrive in musical religion, stick to strings says I."

(1.4)

Such portable instruments as the clarinet and the serpent (a brass wind instrument, whose name conveys its shape) compromised not the customary function of these choirs but merely their traditional composition. Still, the acceptance of even little changes prepares a traditional society to accept increasingly larger changes, until the entire fabric of its traditions begins unraveling. When the organ became the instrument of vogue in religious settings, the choirs could not accommodate an instrument of

its size without undermining their traditional function as well as their composition.

The decisive test of the Mellstock Quire's resistance to change comes in the persons of three antagonists: Fancy Day, Farmer Shiner, and Parson Maybole, each of whom Hardy introduces during the choir's Christmas Eve caroling.

Millgate, in his study of the novels, writes that in Under the Greenwood Tree a character's "responsiveness to music becomes . . . a criterion of moral evaluation" (47). In fact, the reaction of these three characters to the caroling reveals nothing of their morality, but rather the degree to which each owes his or her identity to the culture embodied by the choir. The non-existent debt of Parson Maybole, a newcomer to the region, requires the least analysis, while that of Fancy requires the most. Shiner's debt is complicated by the farmer's--the generic farmer's--antagonism towards the self-employed tradesmen and craftsmen whose livelihood does not derive from agriculture. Fancy's debt is even more complex, since her education has put her above and made her ambivalent toward that class to which the members of the choir and her own family belong.

With an organ temporarily stored in his study, the new parson, whom Douglas Brown calls "the lonely urban invader" (48), neglects to open his window during the caroling and

reluctantly tenders his thanks "from the inner depths of bedclothes" (1.5). The behavior of this man, whose sense of propriety (rather than critical judgment) explains his preference for organ-music, indicates his lack of sympathy with a culture where the sacred and secular coalesce and where folk beliefs mix with established religion. It is not surprising that witches "were gradually losing their mysterious characteristics under the administration of the young vicar," who thus seems almost as much a scientist as man of the cloth (4.3). So well integrated are the spiritual and social lives of the parishioners that Parson Maybole's "hearty borus-snorus ways" are chipping away at the foundation of this society.

There is no one "at home at the Manor," writes Hardy (1.4), and by default, according to Merryn Williams, "the boorish Shiner, farmer and church-warden . . . represents the traditional ruling class of the village" (128). The second of the choir's antagonists whom Hardy introduces during the caroling, Farmer Shiner responds belligerently, "Shut up, woll 'ee! Don't make your blaring row here! A feller wi' a headache enough to split his skull likes a quiet night" (1.5)! Reuben Dewy, Dick's father, knowingly attributes Shiner's ill manners to drunkenness. Since Hardy never again alludes to the farmer's intemperance, it is no less likely that his hostility reflects a fundamental

antagonism towards the choir, an antagonism which chronology proves cannot derive from his romantic interest in Fancy. As yet Shiner does not know that Fancy, who has only just taken up residence as schoolmistress, plays the organ. Although Hardy fails to develop the theme in this novel, Williams points out that farmers "disliked" the "independence" of the class represented by the Mellstock Quire, and she quotes Hardy's observation in Tess that "cottagers who were not directly employed on the land were looked upon with disfavor" by farmers (113).

Hardy himself knew well the tensions that existed between landowners and tradesmen. After a quarrel between his own mother and the wife of a local farmer and churchwarden like Shiner, Hardy's father, as Millgate points out in his biography of the novelist, lost the estate business (46). The invitation to the annual Christmas party that "tranter" Dewy extends to Shiner expresses a tenant's wish to placate a farmer who has the power to turn out families when their lifeholds expire. While Shiner does not belong to the same class as the owner of the manor, he is the other's representative.

The reaction of the choir's third antagonist to the caroling differs substantially from the response of her soon-to-be-suitors, displaying neither Farmer Shiner's

hostility nor Parson Maybole's ignorance. "Thank you, singers, thank you!" Fancy calls out to them from an open window, and her response, though belated, is nonetheless warm (1.5). She knows what custom requires of her. Her warmth shows her receptiveness to and appreciation of local tradition, yet her delay distances her from it.

Neither a local girl nor a stranger, Fancy hails not from Mellstock but from Yalbury Wood, "which formed portion of one of the outlying estates of the Earl of Wessex, to whom [her father] was head gamekeeper, timber-steward, and general overlooker for this district" (2.6). While Yalbury Wood does belong to another parish, the Days still live only a mile from the Dewys. Her family trades in Mellstock: Mr. Penny, the shoemaker and a member of the choir, has fitted three generations of Days with shoes. In short, they are not local people, but Hardy takes pains to establish the family's familiarity to the Mellstock locals.

Fancy's father, who began as a mere gamekeeper, now has "a dozen other irons in the fire" (4.2). The choir debates the extent of his wealth, which seems to make the family's social standing higher than that of the Mellstock tradesmen. Even so, the Days live no better than the others, as one of the choir observes: "'tis rather sharp upon [Fancy], if she's born to fortune, to bring her up as if not born for it, and letting her work so hard" (2.5).

They are oblivious of any class difference between themselves and the Days. For example, Susan Dewy (Dick's sister and Fancy's friend) displays not the faintest recognition of class difference when telling Fancy about the girl with whom Dick danced at a "gipsy-party": "She is so well off--better than any of us. . . . Her father farms five hundred acres, and she might marry a doctor or curate or anything of that kind if she contrived a little" (3.3). As she would not have done had Fancy kept her date with Dick and danced with him, Susan wonders that this other girl of superior social standing condescended to be his partner. According to Williams, "Fancy's social position is somewhere between the Dewys and Maybole" (116). Millgate likewise maintains, in his study of Hardy's novels, that she is of higher "social standing than anyone in Mellstock apart from Parson Maybole" (52). But Hardy, while conveying this impression, refers to Fancy's father, Geoffrey, by his first name--as does the choir. In contrast, it is always "Farmer" Shiner or "Mr" Shiner--whom Geoffrey thinks his daughter would be doing well to marry. Something besides her family's wealth and consequent social standing distances Fancy from the villagers.

It is her education, which also connects her to the alien urban world. Hardy's cousin Tryphena Sparks, a model for Fancy, left her native Dorset to attend Stockwell

Normal College in South London the year before Hardy began Under the Greenwood Tree (Young Thomas Hardy 118). While Hardy fails to specify the site of Fancy's schooling, Geoffrey scoffs at the possibility that his daughter "picked up her good manners, the smooth turn of her tongue, her musical notes, and her knowledge of books, in a homely hole like this" (4.2). Wherever she went, she attended the same kind of institution, a training college, as Tryphena and became, as did this cousin, a "certificated" teacher.

Fancy's refinement, which even Parson Maybole acknowledges, most excites her father's pride. From Geoffrey's perspective, her education rather than the social standing derived from money sets her above the rustic Dick Dewy. While Geoffrey has no thought that it qualifies her to marry someone of the parson's social standing, his ambition is to marry her off to a "gentleman, who sees her to be his equal in polish." Still, he is determined that whoever she marries "shan't be superior to her in pocket" (4.2). Dick certainly meets the second criterion, but to Geoffrey, who lacks polish himself, the coarse Farmer Shiner appears to meet both criteria. The real purpose of Fancy's education has been to secure her marriage into a higher social class than the one into which she was born. Her class mobility testifies to the

opportunities that the new relationship between the country and the city has opened for enterprising rural youth.

Fancy's newly acquired social mobility, which lets her choose a suitor of Maybole's standing almost as easily as one of Dick's, contributes to her inconstancy. With Fancy's fickleness in mind, Dick himself sees her as "a girl, whose feelings, though warm, were not deep." He relates her superficial emotions to her personal vanity, her anxiousness about her "frocks," her great concern about her appearance "in the eyes of other men" (4.1)--a vanity aroused, it is clear, by her acquaintance with life outside her native rural parish. When the "costume" in which she makes her debut as organist flaunts traditional respectability, Dick is incredulous: "Whatever will the vicar say, Fancy?" But Parson Maybole, an urban invader who appreciates fashion, is "not at all angry at her development of costume" (4.5).

Her feelings towards the choir are similarly warm, as her response to the caroling indicates, but they are not deep. Fancy's first appearance in church with her schoolgirls, whose bold, "intrusive" singing abashes "the established choir enthroned above them," discloses her careless disregard of the traditional role of the choir (1.6). Later she tells Dick that she does not want to play the organ, "because she is a friend of [the choir]" (2.3).

Even so, that friendship fails to diminish her great pleasure, soon afterwards, in her debut at the organ: "the crowded chords and interludes it was her pleasure to produce" contrast vividly with the "simpler notes" of the choir (4.5).

Fancy's ambivalence towards the choir reflects her uncertain relationship with her past--an uncertainty that she shares with other of Hardy's characters who lack a parent. While her father's social ambitions for Fancy have engendered in her a carelessness towards tradition, her dead mother stands ready in spirit to reinforce Fancy's respect for continuity. In fact, what is most curious (and comical) about the interior of the Days' house is the duplication of pieces of furniture, "a provision for Fancy when she should marry and have a house of her own," which Hardy attributes to "the forethought of Fancy's mother, exercised from the date of Fancy's birthday onwards" (2.6). Until her wedding day she appears neglectful of her mother's presence. The resilience of rural society depends in this novel not only on Fancy's choice of Dick Dewy as her husband but also on her eventual discovery of her mother's abiding presence, her recognition of her debt to the culture that she has inadvertently held cheap.

When, midway through the novel, the conflict between the choir and its antagonists reaches a climax, it is not so much Fancy's carelessness of tradition or Shiner's hostility or Maybole's ignorant disregard of tradition as it is the choir's own inertia that proves defeating.

Religious customs have lost their claim on the fidelity of the villagers. The union of spiritual interests (for which the choir, no less than church itself, serves as metaphor) has weakened--as a description of the parish illustrates. No longer is the church the center of people's lives:

[H]alf a mile from [the main village] were the church and vicarage, and a few other houses, the spot being rather lonely now, though in past centuries it had been the most thickly-populated quarter of the parish. (1.4)

Hardy's account of cultural attenuation also includes the choir's approval of the late vicar's laxity towards his pastoral duties. He seldom if ever visited his flock, he discouraged the baptism of babies "inclined to squalling" and, since the font would not hold water, christened the others with spit, and he exercised no influence over the choir's choice of hymns (2.2).

While Hardy points to the loss of religious zeal as a symptom of cultural decline, who can doubt that he himself prefers the lax old vicar to the progressive Parson Maybole? Yet what choice remains, if one deplores the decay, except to support the new parson's effort at reform? Hardy's portrait of Grandfather William addresses this question. Only this archaic figure, the titular choir leader, stands apart from the complacent younger men who dominate it. Ironically, his offended piety allies him with the new parson, who has equally strict, though fashionable, notions of propriety.

Grandfather William's insistence that there be no dancing at the tranter's party till after midnight of Christmas Day indicates that ancient customs stand behind his sense of propriety. Yet their meaning is lost, and the old man's intransigence seems a foolish matter of form--especially when, promptly at the stroke of twelve, he casts his piety aside and "tak[es] the bass-viol from its accustomed nail, and touch[es] the strings as irreligiously as could be desired" (1.7).

Still, Hardy seems to view the old man's atavism with nostalgia. When Grandfather William's old-fashioned piety leads him to express his preference for "the hearty borus-snorus ways of the new pa'son" to the complacency of the old one, and to express his sincere belief that Parson

Maybole is "a good young feller," the setting sun, symbolic of the approaching end of Grandfather William's life, transforms the old man into a totem:

Some of the youthful sparkle that used to reside there animated William's eye as he uttered the words, and a certain nobility of aspect was also imparted to him by the setting sun, which gave him a Titanic shadow at least thirty feet in length, stretching away to the east in outlines of imposing magnitude, his head finally terminating upon the trunk of a grand old oak-tree. (2.2)

This passage renders pictorially the veneration that comes with old age.

Yet despite Hardy's apparent nostalgia here, it is ironical that he depicts as a pagan totem an old man so stubborn as Grandfather William in his observance of established religious conventions. Perhaps the meaning of the irony--like the possible pun on "Maybole"--is that the vitality of the pagan spirit, which revives, for example, during Maypole dances (a custom that harks back to the veneration of trees and includes the dance of a wedding party under a greenwood tree), reflects the spiritual health of a community better than does its formal piety.

Grandfather William's piety blinds him not only to Maybole's ulterior motive--his romantic interest in Fancy--for discharging the choir, but also to the fact that Maybole, whose self-identity owes nothing to the culture that Grandfather William can claim as his heritage, is interested far less in tradition than fashion.

If the ancient grandfather flanks the choir on the one side, Dick Dewy (representative of the young generation, which feels a commitment to neither tradition nor fashion) does so on the other. His behavior during the caroling, which Millgate, in his study of the novels, labels "the incipient defection of Dick" (53), provides other early evidence of cultural decline: this tradition, at least, is losing its hold on the young. During the caroling Dick becomes enraptured by his first sight of Fancy, whom Roy Morrell rightly sees as "an image of youth and refinement framed by a rustic and insensitive way of life" (162), and beneath her closed window plays truant to the caroling, which proceeds without him. When, after the next stop (at Farmer Shiner's), the choir discovers Dick's absence, his incredulous father reacts with a gravity befitting only the most calamitous of occurrences:

"The treble man too! Now if he'd been a tenor or counter chap, we might ha' contrived the rest o't without en But for a quire to lose

the treble, why, my sonnies, you may so well lose your . . . " The tranter paused, unable to mention an image vast enough for the occasion.

(1.5)

Underneath the comic exaggeration there lies a serious meaning. Dick is essential to the choir not only because he sings an indispensable part, but also because he belongs--as does Fancy--to the generation whose commitment to tradition alone insures the continuity of village life. Dick's defection on Christmas Eve anticipates his behavior later during the choir's interview with the vicar: "Dick, not having much affection for this errand, soon grew tired, and went away in the direction of the school" (2.4). Indifferent to the fate of the choir, he is not even present at the climax.

The complacency of the Mellstock Quire, the transformation of Grandfather William, its living link with the past, into an archaic figure and a devil's advocate, and the inattentiveness of the younger generation, represented by Dick, to its cultural heritage--all make it inevitable that the interview with the vicar (2.4) will expose the bankruptcy of the traditions on which the continuity of rural life depends. During a strategy session preceding the interview, the choir, unable to justify even to itself its continued existence, agrees with

the tranter (to whom Hardy ironically attributes "new ideas") simply to propose that the choir "stay on till Christmas," a date that will add "a bit of flourish" to its disbandment. When the tranter makes this proposal during the interview, Maybole agrees that it is "reasonable," only to reverse himself at the conclusion of the interview by insolently declaring, "I think your objection to a Sunday which has no name is not one of any real weight." His vague suggestion of "Michaelmas or thereabout" so gratifies the choir that the deluded tranter, who has been its spokesman, is afterwards heard discoursing with self-satisfaction and unintentional irony on the necessity of managing men.

Hardy's original intent to call this novel The Mellstock Quire and his decision to retain this as an alternate title after he had settled on a fashionably poetic one indicate that he conceived the novel as the story first of the choir and second of the courtship of Fancy Day by her three suitors. Even though the choir's interview with the vicar takes place in spring and the choir does not disband till fall, the interview effectively concludes The Mellstock Quire, and the novel itself is not quite half over.

Once the choir has accepted Maybole's decision to replace it with an organ and organist some time during the fall, there is never even the hint of a possible turnaround. Not that the story of Fancy and her three suitors, which occupies the second half of the novel, is irrelevant to that of the choir. As Albert J. Guerard maintains, Under the Greenwood Tree "is the product of the two different but reconcilable impulses of the folk-historian and the psychologist of love" (48). Hardy attempts to reconcile these impulses, as Guerard fails to see, by means of an allegorical marriage between Fancy and Dick. Her modernity challenges the traditions of the choir, even if she owes to the continuity of rural life her fundamental sense of self. Dick is the only one of her suitors who can understand the need to hive bees when they swarm, even if it means arriving late to his own wedding. (When Dick's bees do swarm on his wedding day--a coincidence regarded as a good omen--one recalls the "blundering" of Farmer Shiner and the surprising competence of Fancy during the much earlier honey-taking at the Days' [4.2].) Dick, though indifferent to the tradition of the choir, knows that the kind of work demanding a person's attentiveness to the unpredictable ways of nature is the basis of social ties and cultural values. Fancy's marriage to him, complemented by her humbling rediscovery, during

the preparations for her wedding, of her past in her memory of her dead mother preserves something of the continuity and self-containment of rural life that the disbandment of the choir has seemed certain to destroy. This marriage entrusts the health of the rural community to "a musical executive" who is sensitive to local customs but who is also, because of her distance from them, capable of enlivening rural life much as she has aroused the interest of the otherwise inattentive Dick.

There is never any question but that Fancy will marry Dick. Shiner and Maybole are never really contenders. Her flirtation with the farmer, who is present in the novel mostly by mention, is nothing more than an innocuous off-stage incident that she later exaggerates to make Dick jealous. Fancy never offers Shiner any encouragement, and he never becomes a serious suitor. As for the parson, there are hints of his romantic interest in Fancy throughout the novel, but he becomes an active suitor only late in the story, when Fancy's stunning appearance during her debut as organist inspires him afterwards to propose marriage.

Fancy's rash acceptance of Maybole's proposal is the one serious interruption of her progress towards marriage to Dick. The climax of her story, it exposes to her the negative side of her urban experience, and never again does

she allow her ambitiousness and her vanity (which are really one and the same) to operate so intensely. The scene is farcical. Dick, whom the funeral of a friend has forced to miss Fancy's first Sunday at the organ, returns to Mellstock in the rain, chats with her from outside her window, and walks on home in the rain. Vain about her own appearance, Fancy scrutinizes Dick's and concludes, "I like Dick, and I love him; but how plain and sorry a man looks in the rain, with no umbrella, and wet through"--as if his sorry appearance has given her second thoughts about their impending marriage. Whereupon Parson Maybole enters the scene, carrying (as Fancy perceives) not only an umbrella but one "of superior silk--less common," adds Hardy, "at that date than since--and of elegant make" (4.6). Compared to the fashionable parson, the tranter's son looks countrified indeed. This contrast disposes Fancy to accept Maybole's forthcoming proposal, calculated as it is to appeal to her self-image as an educated and stylish woman.

Afterwards, when her mood is dispassionate, Fancy sees, as she explains in a letter to Maybole, that her love of "refinement of mind and manners," her fascination with "the idea of surroundings more elegant and pleasing than those which have been customary," and her need of "praise" have made her ambitious (in a negative sense) and vain.

"Ambition and vanity," she supposes, "prompted my reply" (4.7).

Fancy's self-recognition prepares her to acknowledge that her self-identity has its source in the continuity and self-containment of rural life. This acknowledgment comes during the wedding festivities. To be sure, her recently acquired notions of respectability are responsible for certain cosmetic changes. Her fashion-consciousness reveals itself in the tranter's comical white gloves, a "hall-mark of respectability . . . set upon himself today (by Fancy's special request) for the first time in his life" (5.1). Also the behavior of her father and the tranter reflects Fancy's class-consciousness, which her urban education has intensified:

Fancy . . . had strictly charged her father and the tranter to carefully avoid saying "thee" and "thou" in their conversation, on the plea that those ancient words sounded so very humiliating to persons of new taste; also that they were never to be seen drawing the back of the hand across the mouth after drinking--a local English custom of extraordinary antiquity, but stated by Fancy to be decidedly dying out among the better classes of society. (5.2)

Her self-conscious respectability even tempts her to discard the traditions themselves, as well as to change the way people dress and behave on occasions like this one. What holds her ambition and vanity in check and compels her to honor regional custom is her recognition, for the first time in the novel, of the presence of her dead mother. It is psychologically significant that Fancy makes the discovery now. Having accumulated a set of furniture for Fancy identical to her own, Fancy's mother represents continuity; since her plan was that Fancy, once married, would live in a house furnished less with pieces from the husband's family or ones that the couple bought together than with the furniture from the house where she grew up, Fancy's mother also stands for self-containment. In short, she has provided Fancy with a means--if rather comical--of preserving the continuity of her own life and her personal sense of self-containment after marriage, a ceremony that involves the symbolic loss of her old identity and the creation of a new one through the union with another person.

Fancy's temptation to dispense with certain customs associated with weddings aggravates this loss, and the result is her need to reclaim something from her past in order to preserve her self-identity. So it is that despite her aversion to walking around the parish with her new

husband and the wedding party--"Respectable people don't nowadays"--Fancy will make the walk "since poor mother did." And similarly, despite her initial preference for the bridesmaids to walk together, as it is "proper" to do, instead of with the groomsmen, Fancy in the end decides, "I'd rather have it the way mother had it" (5.1). Fancy's discovery of her dead mother's presence at this particular juncture derives fundamentally from a clannish reflex. It is a discovery generated by the impulse to assert the values of the past as a defense against the disintegrating effects of the changeful present.

Hardy's formal arrangement, under the greenwood tree, of the newlywed couple and other members of the wedding party seems emblematic of pastoralism, of beneficent nature, in that the "ancient tree, horizontally of enormous extent though having no great pretensions to height," shelters the dancers just as it has lodged "[m]any hundreds of birds." According to Hardy, "tribes of rabbits and hares had nibbled at its bark from year to year; quaint tufts of fungi had sprung from the cavities of its forks; and countless families of moles and earthworms had crept about its roots" (5.2). While Far from the Madding Crowd, Hardy's second Wessex novel, is also pastoral in that there is an Oak (if not a greenwood tree) to shelter the heroine, she and Oak do find themselves exposed for a while to an

"infuriated universe" (37). For now, all of nature, including man, finds refuge within the shade, where the dancers' spiritual health revives as they dance into their pagan past.

Fancy seems, until her wedding day, to have forgotten that she is her mother's daughter as well as her father's. Her recognition has now paved her way towards understanding that even if she realized fully her educational and social opportunities, she would still be an educated and refined country girl. The culture that has created her essential self, as opposed to the accidental one that she has vainly been wearing as a mask, is regional. Still, while her need to preserve her regionalism derives from a clannish impulse, her self-identity is no longer limited by its source. It has in fact been enriched by her urban experience, which Fancy, who has only begun to tame her vanity, has yet to assimilate completely. A modern country girl, she mediates between the destructive insensitivity of the apostles of change and their enervated victims.

Regional Identity in Far from the Madding Crowd

In the 1912 preface to Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy confesses that "the realities out of which [the narrative] was spun were material for another kind of study . . . than is found in the chapters here penned so lightly, even so farcically and flippantly at times." These words echo sentiments expressed in a journal entry of 1888: "If you look beneath the surface of any farce you see a tragedy" (Life 224). Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), though not in the end a tragic narrative, represents the novelist's own first glance at the underside of farce. In this, his second Wessex novel, Hardy presents a heroine whose sexual turbulence, unlike the flirtatiousness of Fancy Day (in the earlier novel), finds its counterpart in such violent weather as never could disturb the commodious shade of the greenwood tree.

It is important to remember that when Thomas Gray refers, in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," to the "madding crowd," he has in mind the likes of Hardy's rustics and even of that archetypal countryman Gabriel Oak, the genius of pastoral Wessex. Of such "rude" folk, Gray writes,

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.

(lines 73-6)

In that their contests belong to lowly country life, their strife is "ignoble." Unlike the exploits of "Ambition" and "Grandeur," the "useful toil" of rural folk--the harvesting of crops, the plowing of fields, the felling of trees--displays no "boast of heraldry," no "pomp of power" (29-33). But the wishes of Bathsheba Everdeen, the heroine of Far from the Madding Crowd, have learned to stray, thanks in part to Ambition and Grandeur, whose acquaintance she apparently made in town. When these wishes and a mutinous erotic urge thrust her into sexual combat with Sergeant Troy (an expert duelist and, equally important, the illegitimate son of an earl), the strife becomes ironically "noble." Bathsheba's victory comes when she symbolically exchanges for good the weapons of war for the tools of peace--those farm implements with which Oak is as impressively skilled as is Troy with a sword.

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Bathsheba, who grew up in town, belongs even more to the country than does Fancy Day, who grew up there. When the novel opens, the death of Bathsheba's parents has

thrown her on the charity of country kin. Hardy stresses throughout the novel the heroine's rural character. While Gabriel Oak is secretly watching her milk a cow at Norcombe, Hardy concludes a long description of her appearance by drawing attention to her country girl's modesty of dress: "Had she been put into a low dress she would have run and thrust her head into a bush. Yet she was not a shy girl by any means; it was merely her instinct to draw the line dividing the seen from the unseen higher than they do it in towns" (Ch. 3--numbers throughout refer to chapters). Later, after the arrival at Weatherbury of the cosmopolitan Sergeant Troy, Hardy insists on Bathsheba's comparative lack of worldliness: "Of the fabricated tastes of good fashionable society she knew but little, and of the formulated self-indulgence of bad, nothing at all." She may be "a woman of the world," but that world, as Hardy maintains, is rural:

that world of daylight coteries and green carpets
wherein cattle form the passing crowd and winds
the busy hum; where a quiet family of rabbits or
hares live on the other side of your party-wall,
where your neighbour is everybody in the tithing,
and where calculation is confined to market-days.
(29)

Finally, after the bodies of Fanny Robin and her child have been brought to the farmhouse and Bathsheba has begun to infer "a connection between her own history and the dimly suspected tragedy of Fanny's end," Hardy frankly explains that Bathsheba's "simple country nature, fed on old fashioned principles, was troubled by that which would have troubled a woman of the world very little" (43).

Still, all women are vain, according to Hardy, and Bathsheba is no exception. (Hardy's term for sexual vanity is "Woman's prescriptive infirmity" [1].) The first thing Bathsheba does in the novel is "to survey herself attentively" in a mirror, at which time she is sitting atop a wagon, piled with household effects, stopped at a toll-gate (1). After she moves to Weatherbury, her vanity becomes an item of gossip among the rustics: "She's a very vain feymell--so 'tis said here and there. . . . 'Tis said that every night at going to bed she looks in the glass to put on her nightcap properly" (6).

As with Fancy, Bathsheba owes her social vanity--though not her sexual vanity--to her urban experience, which has included an education at least superior to that of most country folk and has inspired in her the self-image of a fashionable woman of the world. Bathsheba, who "can spaik real language, and"--so the Weatherbury rustics conclude--"must have some sense somewhere" (15), oversees

the sheep-washing incongruously dressed in "a new riding-habit--the most elegant she had ever worn" (19). Much earlier at Norcombe Hill, she rejected Oak's suit not only because she thought him weak and did not love him, but also because she was "better educated" than he (4). Later, when she tells Liddy, her maid, that a man did want to marry her once but that "He wasn't quite good enough for me" (9), she apparently has in mind Oak's inferior education. A farmer then, Oak was in fact her social superior.

Bathsheba displays a vain delight that she can marry up. Her inheritance, rather than her education (which, it shames her to admit to Troy, has been deficient) qualifies her to do so. For her the gentleman-farmer Boldwood, as Roy Morrell maintains, represents "a certain social goal: Propriety and respectability" (60). Writes Hardy, "his persona" (like that of Shiner in Under the Greenwood Tree) "was the nearest approach to aristocracy that this remoter quarter of the parish could boast of" (18), and his proposal, Bathsheba knows, "was one which not a few women of higher rank . . . would have been wild to accept and publish" (20). But the cosmopolitan Sergeant Troy, with his "aurora militaris" (suggestive of sexual skill), excites her sexual as well as social vanity. "It was a fatal omission of Boldwood's," as Hardy observes, "that [Boldwood] had never once told her she was beautiful" (24).

Troy, the "blade" who flatters her, proves more seductive than either Boldwood or Oak, her natural mate, whose lack of sexual appeal lies in his perceived inability to "tame" her.

It is conceivable that Boldwood--who later (in anticipation of his marriage) buys "Bathsheba Boldwood" expensive dresses, which he keeps in a locked closet--might compliment Bathsheba on her fashionable clothes. Clothes signify, however, not her sexual vanity (to which a word in praise of her physical beauty would appeal) but rather her social vanity. Bathsheba's Boldwood is an externalization of her social vanity--he represents a social goal. Boldwood sees her also as an abstraction and not as a sexual being. Through his idealization of her as a "blithe Spirit," he becomes himself, like Shelley's skylark, a "Scorner of the ground." His wedding proposal, which Bathsheba (who enjoys acting as her own bailiff) agrees to consider, promises her respectability--which includes freedom from the seasonal anxieties of farming: "you shall never have so much as to look out of doors at haymaking time, or to think of weather in the harvest" (19). By contending with the weather--by managing the farm--Bathsheba is, if inadvertently, converting her potentially riotous sexuality (an internalization of the weather) into

creative energy. Acceptance of Boldwood's proposal would mean the suppression of her sexuality--the woman would become her clothes, symbolic of her social position.

Boldwood's idealistic vision, which transforms Bathsheba into a "blithe Spirit," is the product of a peculiar imagination that Allen Tate has termed "angelic": "I call that human imagination angelic," as Tate explains, "which tries to disintegrate or to circumvent the image in the illusory pursuit of essence" (Essays 429). While Tate associates this effort with Poe, it applies equally well to Shelley, towards whom Hardy displays extreme ambivalence. Boldwood idealizes Bathsheba as Shelley does the skylark, which he perceives as a disembodied voice. More to the point, Boldwood's conception of Bathsheba parallels Shelley's conception of Teresa Viviani in "Epipsychidion," an "idealized history of [the poet's] life and feelings." Shelley refers to this Italian girl of whom he grew enamored as "a Being whom my spirit oft / Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft"--in the "blue deep," presumably, where wingest the bird that "never wert"--and he proceeds to describe her as "robed in such exceeding glory, / That I beheld her not" (lines 190-200). The poet's pursuit of essence, of this "Sweet Spirit," ultimately proves illusory, as Tate maintains that it must do, when Shelley finds that the concrete associations of

even a highly rarefied poetic language debase his vision: "The winged words on which my soul would pierce / Into the height of love's rare Universe, / Are chains of lead around its flight of fire" (588-90). Boldwood, of course, never perceives the illusory nature of his pursuit of Bathsheba. As Jean R. Brooks explains, "His wild happiness at the prospect of 'six years of intangible ethereal courtship' and the psychotic clothes fetishism are correlative to his desire to worship Bathsheba's image in place of the flesh and blood woman" (171-2).

Hardy's description of the eventual effect on Bathsheba of Boldwood's idealization of her challenges the Shelleyan aesthetics, which it is suicidal for the regionalist to adopt. Bathsheba--whose encouragement of Boldwood has betrayed her earthbound, regional self in favor of herself as a fashionable woman (to Bathsheba an ideal)--has all but collapsed under pressure from Boldwood to accept a six-years courtship: she "was in a very peculiar state of mind, which showed how entirely the soul is the slave of the body, the ethereal spirit dependent for its quality upon the tangible flesh and blood" (51). The first half of the dependent clause echoes Shelley's frustrating discovery at the end of "Epipsychidion," but Hardy's respect for the body, implied by the second half of the clause, is antithetical to Shelley, who yearns at the

end of the poem for "annihilation." For Shelley, who would rather not even acknowledge a connection, the spirit derives nothing positive from its relation to the body. Not so for Hardy. In the poem "Shelley's Skylark" (101), his most explicit challenge to Shelley, Hardy insists that the Romantic poet was wrong to deny that the skylark was a bird. In fact, writes Hardy (making a point of itemizing its physical components),

. . . it only lived like another bird,
And knew not its immortality:

Lived its meek life; then, one day, fell--
A little ball of feather and bone;

John Crowe Ransom argues that the "primary cause" of "regionalism" is "the physical nature of the region" (Selected Essays 49). Boldwood's ruin exemplifies the danger that Shelley's aesthetics holds for the regionalist, whose livelihood--whose art--depends on his respectful attention to the particular demands of his environment. Boldwood, whose idealization of Bathsheba inspired him to promise that she, as his wife, would have no thought of weather "in the harvest," allows his infatuation so to occupy his mind that he neglects to attend to the covering of his ricks during a torrential rain (38). His sterile vision of Bathsheba as a "blithe Spirit" has proved self-

consuming, and he has become himself a "Scorner of the ground."

If the farm embodies Bathsheba's earthbound, sensuous nature, which Troy (who sees Bathsheba as a sexual object) incites to riot, then she has been, perhaps unknowingly, attempting to master it herself by managing the farm. Troy's sexual exploitation of Bathsheba translates literally into an exploitation of the farm. Their relationship thus threatens to lay waste the cultivated countryside.

A Byronic insistence on the legitimacy of sense impressions and ridicule of the notion that nurturing the flesh is less vital than nurturing the spirit provide the basis for Troy's "aesthetics." He would agree in principle with Byron's assertion that the "tocsin of the soul" is the "dinner bell" (Don Juan 5.49). Joseph Poorgrass, one of the Weatherbury rustics, concurs: "Yes; victuals and drink is a cheerful thing. . . . 'Tis the gospel of the body, without which we perish" (22). But for Joseph Poorgrass and other regional men and women, whose culture is symbolized in Far from the Madding Crowd by the great barn (which Hardy compares with a church), this gospel depends on the cultivation of nature. Troy, who sees Bathsheba as his "meal ticket," leaves farming to others. Like the

Byron of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Troy himself is "as a weed, / Flung from the rock on Ocean's foam to sail / Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail" (3.2). A restless man who never has cultivated his own roots, Troy has no cultural values. As with the hero of Byron's nihilistic Don Juan, Troy's talent is his ability to adapt, if but for a while, to whatever society chance lands him in. Like Don Juan and unlike Ulysses, whose odyssey leads home, Troy journeys aimlessly.

His rootlessness is pervasive. Bathsheba grew up elsewhere but belongs to Weatherbury. Troy hails from the district but belongs nowhere--though he is far more at home in town than in the country: he has a highly developed sense of fashion (39) and feels nothing but "disgust with the, to him, humdrum tediousness of a farmer's life" (47). A nomad from birth, this illegitimate son of a French governess and an English lord has neither family nor country. Naively optimistic, he does not mind "the peculiarities of his birth, the vicissitudes of his life, the meteor-like uncertainty of all that related to him" (46). He enters the novel a soldier, whose life is characterized by transience; after leaving Bathsheba, he works as a deckhand on a brig bound for America; at the time of his return to Weatherbury he is performing in a

traveling circus. Troy's emotional make-up is "fitful" (50).

Then, too, there is Troy's disregard of history: "He was a man to whom memories were an incumbrance, and anticipations a superfluity. . . . With him the past was yesterday; the future, to-morrow; never, the day after" (25). Troy lives by "chance" (25). Just as he "wasted his gifted lot" by enlisting as a soldier, so is he ready to squander a family heirloom, a symbol of his personal history, on a tumble with Bathsheba, whom he regards as merely another object placed in his way by chance. Troy has in mind only her seduction when he tries to give her "all the fortune that ever [he] inherited," a watch that belonged to his natural father and that his mother's husband used (26).

While Troy seems never to have been a regional man, his cosmopolitanism corresponds to what Tate has termed the "new provincialism": "that state of mind in which regional men lose their origins in the past and its continuity into the present, and begin every day as if there had been no yesterday." According to Tate, "The provincial attitude" (as opposed to "regionalism") "is limited in time but not in space." In contrast, "regionalism is that consciousness or that habit of men in a given locality which influences them to certain patterns of thought and conduct handed to

them by their ancestors. Regionalism," Tate concludes, "is thus limited in space but not in time" (Essays 542).

In his essay "The New Provincialism," Tate asserts that "the world today"--he is writing in 1945--"is perhaps more provincial in outlook than it has been at any time since the ninth century, and even that era had, in its primitive agrarian economy, a strong regional basis for individual independence" (540). If Tate is right about the modern world, then Troy's estrangement from history makes this picaro a peculiarly modern man. After his marriage to Bathsheba and his move into the house that she inherited from her uncle, Troy--feeling "like new wine in an old bottle"--describes to the disapproving Oak his plan to modernize the farmhouse (35). Troy's modernity, of course, complements Bathsheba's sense of her own: much earlier, shortly after her move to Weatherbury, there is critical talk among the rustics that "her old uncle's things were not good enough for her. She've bought all but everything new" (15).

In his complacency, aimlessness, and lack of historical sense and cultural values, Troy not only recalls Don Juan or Byron himself, whose historical perspective is diminished by a journalist's myopic respect for facts, but also anticipates a typically twentieth-century man, who is victimized less, perhaps, by the journalist's respect for

facts than by the scientist's. Ransom, whose poems date mostly from the 1920s (a time of cultural transition for the rural South), depicts this person with memorable wit as a "Man without Sense of Direction" (Selected Poems 81-2):

He flails his arm, he moves his lips:
 "Rage have I none, cause, time, nor country--
 Yet I have traveled land and ships
 And knelt my seasons in the chantry."

Ransom concludes with a warning to "the tender thing in his charge" that "She shall not kiss that harried one / To peace." Only late in the novel does Troy become as "harried" as this man, but meanwhile Bathsheba has wasted her kisses on him. What woman's kisses would not go to waste on a bastard whose motto, like that of his natural father, is "Love yields to circumstance" (26)? Even Troy's "love," in that its fitfulness allows it but the pleasure of the moment, is provincial.

A significant coincidence, Bathsheba's first encounter with Troy comes after dark following the sheep-shearing. For this activity, which she supervises, draws forth her suppressed sexuality. While she watches, the ewe that Oak is shearing "blushes at the insult." As Hardy implies, Bathsheba empathizes with the ewe (later compared with

Aphrodite) as if she herself were the creature (and the goddess of earthly love) whom Oak is undressing. And she also identifies with the "queens of coteries," who would envy the "delicacy" of the ewe's "flush," and the women of the world to whom its "promptness" would do credit (22). When Boldwood appears on the scene and their flirtation distracts Oak (the suitor whom Bathsheba is in effect rejecting now a second time) and he "snip[s] the sheep in the groin," Oak accidentally inflicts on the ewe a wound similar to the sexual one that the sadistic Bathsheba has metaphorically inflicted on him: she "herself was the cause of the poor ewe's wound, because she had wounded the ewe's shearer in a still more vital part" (22). Bathsheba, in that she empathizes with the ewe, is also wounding herself through Oak. In effect, she is appealing to him to violate her sexually.

Bathsheba, whom Troy later "masters" with a sword (after she has alluded to the "pleasure of a bayonet wound"), apparently desires the "pleasure" of a wound inflicted by Oak's shears. For her, sex is a martial art. In an earlier scene, where Oak (compared with "Eros") is sharpening the shears, Hardy remarks, "Peace and war kiss each other at their hours of preparation--sickles, scythes, shears, and pruning-hooks ranking with swords, bayonets, and lances, in their common necessity for point and edge."

This scene provides an alternative to combat as a metaphor for sex--sex as pastoral work in common--and suggests how potentially disruptive is Bathsheba's contrasting, martial view. When Bathsheba, ignorant of how to hold the shears, takes over for Cain Ball (who has been assisting the shepherd), Oak,

enclosing her two hands completely in his own (taking each as we sometimes clasp a child's hand in teaching him to write), grasped the shears with her. "Incline the edge so," he said.

Hands and shears were inclined to suit the words, and held thus for a peculiarly long time by the instructor as he spoke. (22)

As soon as Bathsheba perceives Oak's meaning, she exclaims, "Loose my hands. I won't have them held!" Her reaction reflects her disdain not only for the socially inferior, rustic Oak, but also for the kind of sex that holding hands connotes. So long as Bathsheba works hand in hand with Oak, she is able to convert her discordant sexuality into the creative energy necessary to run a farm. But she wants war. At the beginning of the novel, when she rejects Oak's proposal of marriage, she insists that he could never "tame" her. In fact, it is her nature to fight

domestication. She wants to be mastered by a mutinous eroticism.

Bathsheba's sexual arousal during the later sheep-shearing prepares her for the encounter with Troy, which occurs that same day after dark, and even more for the sexually charged sword-exercise soon afterwards.

Bathsheba's sadism towards Oak (which translates into masochism) reflects her contempt at his inability to "tame" her. That Bathsheba's dress should become entangled in Troy's spur indicates Troy's potential to master her, as a rider does a mare; and it soon becomes clear that Bathsheba is prepared to be mastered by a man whose military aspect is enhanced by worldly charm. As she tells him shortly before the sword-exercise, "if you can only fight half as winning as you can talk, you are able to make a pleasure of a bayonet wound" (26).

Bathsheba's social vanity, which tends to suppress her sexual feelings, concedes to them now. It satisfies her social vanity that Troy is the son, if illegitimate, of an earl. Bathsheba's perception of Troy as a man of the world, which she acquires after their first encounter but before the sword-exercise, justifies her sexual surrender. More than Boldwood, whose background Hardy never reveals, Troy complements Bathsheba's self-image as a woman of the world and her misplaced confidence in the scope of her

education. (When he asks her if she reads French, she has to admit, "No; I began, but when I got to the verbs, father died" [26].) Like Bathsheba, Troy went to school in town; according to the uneducated Liddy, he attended "Casterbridge Grammar School for years and years. Learnt all the languages while he was there; and it was said he got on so far that he could take down Chinese in shorthand" (24). From this exaggerated account Bathsheba concludes, as she tells the self-educated Oak, that Troy is "an educated man, and quite worthy of any woman" (29).

Troy's "noble" birth, which excites Bathsheba's class-consciousness despite his illegitimacy, makes him her "worthy." Says Liddy, "He's a doctor's son by name, which is a great deal; and he's an earl's son by nature!" "Which is a great deal more," Bathsheba gushes (24). So blind is her vanity, which insists on Troy's social standing in order to justify her sexual surrender, that she rejects Oak's contemptuous and accurate judgment that Troy's "being higher in learning and birth than the ruck o' soldiers is anything but a proof of his worth. It shows his course to be down'ard" (29). Even Liddy has suggested that Troy "wasted his gifted lot" by becoming a soldier. Both Oak and Liddy, who have no pretense to worldliness, see Troy's "aurora militaris," which bedazzles Bathsheba, as evidence of his degeneration.

The seduction occurs, of course, during the sword-exercise. Set in a "saucer-shaped pit" surrounded at the top by ferns and "floored with a thick flossy carpet of moss and grass intermingled, so yielding that the foot was half-buried within it" (a topographical representation of female genitalia), the sado-masochistic sword-exercise, which includes the rape of a lock and culminates in an erotic rather than fraternal kiss, is a symbolic dramatization of sexual intercourse. Afterwards, writes Hardy, Bathsheba "felt powerless to withstand or deny him" (29).

Nevertheless, she does go to Bath, as she later tells Oak, "in the full intention of breaking off my engagement to Mr. Troy" (37). Her regionalism is struggling to overcome provincialism. Bathsheba, fundamentally a regional woman whose experiences have been confined within a far more restricted area than she likes to admit, finds herself "alone in a strange city." Hers is the loneliness and helplessness of the proverbial country girl overwhelmed by the strangeness of the city. Despite her upbringing in a town, Bathsheba's experiences have hardly been cosmopolitan. (Thus Hardy's emphasis on her country connections.) In her hometown she merely sampled urban life. Furthermore, she seems similarly to have only sampled sex. She is no more promiscuous than cosmopolitan.

Troy, much traveled sexually as well as--it seems--geographically, exploits Bathsheba's "simple country nature." When he threatens to abandon her by transferring his affections from her to a "more beautiful" woman, Bathsheba marries him.

In Bath Bathsheba "burns," as does a self-divided character in one of Ransom's poems, "far from [her] cause, [her] proper heat and center" (37). Hardy implies that the marriage never would have occurred at Weatherbury. Oak's intuition tells him that the marriage resulted from "Troy's meeting her away from home" (35). Parson Thirdly similarly attributes the tragic end of Fanny Robin, another of Troy's conquests, to her departure from Weatherbury--which the parson stops just short of labeling a sin: "We must remember that though she may have erred grievously in leaving home, she is still our sister" (42). If the parson seems foolish, preaching provincialism (in the old, familiar sense of the term and not in Tate's "new" sense), it is worth recalling that Hardy himself maintained that "[a] certain provincialism of feeling is invaluable" (Life 151)--not because it secures a person from worldly temptation but because it forces him to see that his own individuality and that of his region are ineluctably bound. Bathsheba's salvation from the uprooting that her marriage to Troy threatens to cause depends not only on her

recognition of her sisterhood to Fanny but also to her recognition of her regional identity. Robert Frost's poem "The Gift Outright" (467) illuminates this theme with admirable conciseness:

The land was our before we were the land's.

 Something we were withholding made us weak
 Until we found out that it was ourselves
 We were withholding from our land of living,
 And forthwith found salvation in surrender.

Frost is not advocating a surrender to nature (which is the opposite of the cultivation of nature); rather, he is advocating a surrender to those tasks that the physical--and psychological--environment demands before it can nourish the commonwealth.

Bathsheba's marriage to a rootless modern man threatens to uproot her from her "land of living." A regional woman, she is in the process of becoming a "new provincial." As Tate explains,

When the regional man, in his ignorance, often an intensive and creative ignorance, of the world, extends his own immediate necessities into the world, and assumes that the present moment is unique, he becomes the provincial man. He cuts

himself off from the past, and without benefit of the fund of traditional wisdom approaches the simplest problems of life as if nobody had ever heard of them before. A society without arts, said Plato, lives by chance. The provincial man, locked in the present, lives by chance. (539)

When Bathsheba overcomes her vanity, she, like Fancy Day, discovers her rootedness, her regionalism. Fancy's social vanity collapses when she discovers the abiding presence of her dead mother. In contrast, Bathsheba's social vanity dissolves when she recognizes her own enduring "creatureliness" (a term applied by Douglas Brown to another of Hardy's characters [134]), and it takes a far more dramatic occasion than the traditional wedding-day dance in Under the Greenwood Tree to force Bathsheba into this confrontation. A violent storm--an "infuriated universe" that seems an externalization of her own sexual tumult, which threatens to wreck her livelihood--explodes her fanciful notion that any consideration other than sex brought her surrender to Troy.

Before her marriage to Troy, Bathsheba is able, through work, to turn her potentially destructive energy to creative ends. Her decision, when she inherits the farm,

to manage it herself has the practical effect of involving her in the physical life of rural Wessex. By managing the farm, she is unknowingly nurturing her regional self. As bailiff, she makes a habit "of looking round the homestead before going to bed, to see that all was right and safe for the night" (24). She also hives her bees herself and has to explain to Troy that "you must have on the veil and gloves, or you'll be stung fearfully" (27). By working even vicariously with the men, she is seeing that all is right and safe within her own potentially stormy psyche. When she does lose her temper with Oak (when he declines, in a scene that crackles with sexual tension, to admit that he still loves her even as he lectures her on her "levity" with Boldwood) and fires the shepherd (her natural mate), economic ruin threatens the farm. Although Bathsheba's presence is a "stimulus" to the rustics, only shepherd Oak can cure the "blasted" sheep (21).

Even after her marriage to Troy, Bathsheba continues to oversee the farming herself "as well as her duties in the house would allow" (41). She does her best to prove wrong the servants, who seem to have envisioned almost as an orgy her union with Troy--they felt sure that she, once married to him, would stop farming (30). Still, because of Troy's gambling debts (which testify to his addiction to a life of chance), the consequence anticipated by the

servants looms at the time of his disappearance. As Bathsheba tells him several days earlier, "We shall have to leave the farm; that will be the end of it" (39)! Irving Howe is generally correct to see that "Bathsheba, in all her emotional phases, is steadily responsible to her farm and the men who work on it: that proves to be her salvation" (53). However, only intervening circumstances prevent Bathsheba's rash marriage to Troy from bringing an end to her farming.

Bathsheba's predicament--the exploitation of a regional woman by a cosmopolitan man--finds an analogy in the incident involving Troy and the rustics after the harvest supper and dance. Troy "contemptuously" suspends their policy, itself a responsible answer to the workers' notorious "love of fuddling," of drinking only cider and ale. He insists that they drink brandy (36). Their helplessness this night is somewhat analogous to Bathsheba's helplessness in Bath. By comparing the "subdued roar" of the snoring rustics (which Oak hears from the doorway) with the sound of London "from a distance," Hardy implies that in a sense Troy has brought the city to the country (36). The rustics might as well be in London as asleep this night in Weatherbury. They are lost in the city; they have no more business there than did Bathsheba in Bath.

When she goes out in the storm to see if Troy has covered the hayricks as he promised to do, Bathsheba is merely exercising the same responsibility to the farm as she did before the sergeant "rul[ed] . . . in the room of his wife" (26). But tonight she finds herself participating more intensely than ever before in the physical life of the farm, and she forgets the woman of the world whom she has fancied herself to be. The fury of the storm, which temporarily seems to dwarf "everything human," isolates her physical self, whose only concern is the weather, from her social accomplishments. Her education, such as it is, and her eye for fashion do not help her shoulder the sheaves for Oak.

When Bathsheba, after the worst of the storm has passed, peers into the dark barn and hears "the steady buzz of many snores" (37)--a subdued urban roar--she realizes that Troy, far from coming to her aid in Bath, took sexual advantage of her helplessness. And she, like a later heroine (Tess), jumped "out of the frying pan into the fire" (Tess 10). With a new self-understanding, she addresses Oak in "a strange and impressive voice" and begins to tell him how she happened to marry Troy. The intensity of this labor with Oak, necessary to endure the storm, has thrown into relief the mistake she made in Bath, when she let her sexual desire master her. Her cooperation

with Oak in a natural setting of magnificent beauty and "diabolical" sound differs dramatically from her sado-masochistic relationship with Troy, to which she took a turbulent sexuality. The storm seems to have externalized the storm within Bathsheba, which prompted her marriage to Troy--a sexuality that is to work what the weapons of war are to the farm implements of peace. Working with Oak, Bathsheba tames the storm within herself and strives to save the harvest. To this experience she carries an elemental vitality with which she protects her livelihood.

The storm also brings her into physical contact with Oak. In effect this episode returns them to the earlier scene where Oak, while showing his mistress how to hold the shears, held her hands. Before that scene was over, she demanded that he release them. Atop the rick they work together hand in hand. She treats him as a lover. Afterwards Oak muses "upon the contradictoriness of that feminine heart which had caused her to speak more warmly to him to-night than she ever had done whilst unmarried and free to speak as warmly as she chose" (37). Their work together now corrects the effect of the incident during the sheep-shearing when Bathsheba inflicted on Oak a symbolic sexual wound. Not only does their experience during the storm reverse the effect of that incident, but their work together translates into a healthy inversion of the sword-

exercise, where sex acquired a deeper sado-masochistic thrust than during the sheep-shearing. Now, within the context of work (whose objective is the preservation of human order amid chaotic nature), sex becomes fertile and domestic. If Troy's martial skill, suggestive of sexual expertise, earlier excited Bathsheba's restless nature, Oak's competence--she now discovers--appeals to her regional nature.

Bathsheba is brought physically by the storm that follows the harvest supper and emotionally by her climactic confrontation with Troy after Fanny Robin's death face to face with her "creature" self. This meeting with Troy recalls the scene in Bath. In that her sexual feelings master her again, Bathsheba again is lost, and Troy has another chance (which this time he declines) to "rescue" her. In Bath, as became a man whose motto is "Love yields to circumstance," Troy threatened to transfer his affections from Bathsheba to another woman, as he had previously transferred them from Fanny to Bathsheba. In the emotional scene after Fanny's death, when Troy fulfils his threat by claiming Fanny now as his real wife, Bathsheba ceases to be the coquette whose playful flirting has had the one purpose of winning her praise and becomes an elemental creature fighting to keep her mate. Her lust for flattery wells from the depth of her sexual being; and this

scene discloses the profound sexual nature of her feelings for Troy. He ceases to be for her a man of the world and simply becomes her man. Right before his return this night, an "indignant" Bathsheba was meditating "upon compromised honour, forestallment, eclipse in maternity by another." But now "[a]ll that was forgotten in the simple and still strong attachment of wife to husband" (43). Bathsheba's amoral desperation allows no considerations of honor, and there is no vanity in "the childlike pain and simplicity" of her plea: "You will, Frank, kiss me too!" (43).

Troy's transferral of affection from Bathsheba to Fanny--an abandonment of sorts--precipitates an emotional crisis even more intense than the physical one brought on by Troy's neglect of the ricks and absence during the storm: "A vehement impulse to flee from him, to run from this place, hide, and escape his words at any price, not stopping short of death itself, mastered Bathsheba now" (43). This impulse to flee suggests a revulsion with her sexual self. It proves impossible, however, for Bathsheba to escape her erotic feelings, as she learns when she awakens the next morning and becomes, "with a freshened existence and a cooler brain," aware of the place to which she fled. The "malignant" swamp renders topographically the cancer-like destructiveness that always underlay, even

when it seemed in remission (as it does now), her sexual attraction to Troy (44). Consequently, she resolves to defend herself even as a lost cause, or--as Bathsheba advises Liddy to do should something similar happen to her--"Stand your ground, and be cut to pieces. That's what I'm going to do" (44).

Bathsheba's defense involves, appropriately, locking herself in the attic, where her uncle's old things, which she once pridefully replaced with new, are stored. Even so, Bathsheba reveals herself to be a modern country girl who (unlike Liddy) knows that samplers are "out of date--horribly countrified." But she no longer discards old things just because they are old. She wants now to read her uncle's old books, which she had earlier had boxed up--among them novels about rural life (44). Furthermore, it may be that her model in this new endeavor is that archetypal, self-educated countryman himself, Gabriel Oak, whom Bathsheba, as her desperation was reaching a climax the night before, saw calmly reading in his cottage (43).

If the bravado of her determination to stand her ground represents an attempt, through overstatement, to disguise a masochistic desire to be cut to pieces, it is odd that she allies herself in spirit with Oak. Her retreat to the attic signals a new effort on Bathsheba's part to recover and to preserve the fertile domesticity

that her relationship with Troy has all but destroyed. She takes with her an image of Oak, the purpose of whose reading (which includes instructional books on agricultural matters) is to make him a superior countryman--to give him as much expertise with "sickles, scythes, shears, and pruning-hooks" as Troy's military training has given him with "swords, bayonets, and lances." Bathsheba's emulation of Oak suggests a new understanding of sex--that it becomes fertile only within the pastoral context of man's cultivation of nature.

II

Until now Bathsheba has failed to distinguish the self-taught Oak from the illiterate rustics, who themselves consider him distinguished by his superior learning: "We hear that ye be a extraordinary good and clever man, shepherd" (15). Hardy's own observation that Oak "had acquired [from a limited series of books] more sound information by diligent perusal than many a man of opportunities has done from a furlong of laden shelves" (8) not only compliments Oak but also implicitly reproaches Bathsheba for her disparagement of the countryman who later becomes her mentor.

"Gabriel Oak"--the name implies that he, like the integrated society that Hardy imagines rural England once had, represents a harmonious fusion of spiritual and naturalistic values. In Far from the Madding Crowd, an agricultural novel, rural culture is symbolized by the "great barn" whose "ground-plan resembled a church." Hardy also notes that the barn "not only emulated the form of the neighboring church of the parish, but vied with it in antiquity." Furthermore, as Hardy sees the matter, what is no longer true of the church remains emphatically true of the barn: "The purpose which had dedicated its original erection was the same with that to which it was still applied. . . . [T]he old barn embodied practices which had suffered no mutilation at the hands of time" (22). Similarly, the rural folk, who still dress and speak as did their ancestors, are "in harmony with the barn" (22). Hardy cannot say for certain which came first, the church or the barn, but he implies that those permanent values which people regard as spiritual emerge from naturalistic activity: here in Wessex, writes Hardy, "The defence and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire" (22).

What a person cultivates from nature--that which is born, in other words, of his taming of nature to his purposes--preserves the body against an idealism that

denies that the body needs any nourishment other than spiritual and against a profligate sensuality that, by conforming to nature, ravages the body whose daily bread it has squandered. Oak personifies what the great barn symbolizes. His role in the novel is the defense and salvation of Bathsheba, which he accomplishes by helping her to preserve her regional identity against the pathological idealism of Boldwood and the profligate sensuality of Troy.

Oak assumes this role only after his arrival at Weatherbury. Before then he plays the part of a culture in transition, uncertain of its values. (Merryn Williams rightly warns the casual reader that "Gabriel can too easily be seen as the romanticized archetypal countryman" [134, my emphasis].) At first an elusive character, Oak is himself passing through a period of transition, attributable in part to the apparently recent death of his father. (Hardy never mentions Oak's mother.) Old Gabriel's death has made Oak's connection with his past even more tenuous than it would normally be for a fellow who, at twenty-eight, "had just reached the time of life at which 'young' is ceasing to be a prefix of 'man' in speaking of one." No longer a reckless youth, Oak has not yet become a staid, opinionated family man (1). He has an even temper, but he lacks force of character (5).

His direction in life is now, more than it would be if his father were living, a matter of choice. Still, he is not exactly floundering. He has ambitions--he does not want to live his father's life as a shepherd. But unlike Bathsheba, a farmer by accident whose social aspirations tempt her away from farming, Oak only wants to improve his standing in the rural world. He does not want to break with his past. Since his father's death Oak has worked his way up from shepherd to bailiff to farmer. It has taken him a year of "sustained efforts of industry and chronic good spirits" to be able "to lease a small sheep-farm of which Norcombe Hill was a portion, and stock it with two hundred sheep" (2). Even the goal of his self-education--an ambition that often signals in Hardy's novels a desire to leave the country--is partly to train Oak in country matters. Among his few books, which also include several standard literary classics, are ones on blacksmithing and veterinary medicine (8).

Oak never doubts that he belongs to the country, and yet, at the beginning of the novel, his character lacks focus. This deficiency, which derives not only from the transitional state of his own life but also from the temporal vastness of his world, is illustrated by a richly suggestive passage describing Oak's watch and his other means of telling time. Oak's watch, which Hardy calls "a

small silver clock" on account of its size, may or may not be a family heirloom, as is Troy's--Hardy says only that it is "several years older than Oak's grandfather." But as a symbol of time, it connects Oak to his ancestral past. Metaphorically, the recent death of his father partly explains why this watch is undependable. The past is no longer a reliable referent for Oak, whose as yet nostalgic rather than practical fidelity to his ancestral past is manifest in his attachment to a watch that often fails to work.

Oak's two other means of telling time establish the poles of his existence. To compensate for the defects of his watch, Oak has learned to tell time by the sun and stars, time-keepers of a pre-mechanical age. There are also the clocks that Oak can see through the windows of neighboring cottages. These clocks are not necessarily newer than Oak's watch--in fact, their brass dials have turned green. Still, they represent the settled future towards which Oak, now living in a "portable" hut, aspires. The time as told by these two means lacks for Oak the immediate relevance of the time as told by his antique watch. Nevertheless, Hardy's picture of him, standing outside a cottage--the stars at his back, the watch in his pocket--and peering through a window at his neighbor's clock, is that of a man at a threshold. The passage also

images the continuity of a world where change comes so slowly that it never quite displaces whatever exists already. Oak is, at the beginning of the novel, a man in transition almost overwhelmed by the vast stasis of the rural world.

Only after he moves to Weatherbury does he become the solid Oak that critics have in mind when they use words and phrases like "steadfastness" (Brown 55), "sturdy resistance," "endurance" (Morrell 61), "center of stability" (Howe 54). The object of the first six chapters is to show Oak's amorphous character acquire definition, which it lacks because it has no moral center. The kind of man he is depends on the mood of whoever tries to characterize him:

to state his character as it stood in the scale of public opinion, when his friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was rather a good man; when they were neither, he was a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture. (1)

Millgate suggests in his study of the novels that Hardy, who preferred to show characters in action before analyzing them, had trouble with Oak because he had "to

create Gabriel 'cold' in the opening pages" (82-3). In fact, Hardy's dramatization of Oak's character in the early chapters reveals exactly the immobility readers ought to expect to see in such an unformed character.

Even Oak's ambitions as a farmer seem more resolute than they probably are, since his fundamental stasis works unconsciously to thwart them. Oak's inertia, for instance, is largely responsible for the fire that almost kills him while he is sleeping in his newfangled shepherd's hut. It is true that he deliberately leaves the windows shut to let the place warm up, that he falls asleep because of exhaustion, and that the dwindling supply of oxygen renders his sleep especially sound. But this is not the first time the incident has occurred. As Oak tells Bathsheba after she rescues him, "I gave ten pounds for that hut. But I'll sell it and sit under thatched hurdles as they did in old times, and curl up to sleep in a lock of straw! It played me nearly the same trick the other day" (3). The episode reveals Oak as a rather ineffectual, archaic figure despite his ambitions. It is probably a mistake to regard the hut as a symbol of threatening change, even though Hardy spends two paragraphs accounting for its anomalous presence on the pastoral landscape. Still, Oak's inability to master its modern features and his nostalgia for "old times" reinforce

Hardy's depiction of him as both the personification of a static culture and a character in transition.

A witness after the fact to Oak's inattentiveness, Bathsheba chastises him for it: "It was not exactly the fault of the hut. . . . You should, I think, have considered, and not have been so foolish as to leave the slides closed" (3). Self-consciously modern, the sexually smoldering Bathsheba may have this incident in mind when, shortly thereafter, she makes Oak's inertia an issue in her rejection of his marriage proposal: "I want somebody to tame me; I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know" (4).

Her general insight into his character bears on the "pastoral tragedy" that ends Oak's nascent career as a farmer. Not only can he not tame Bathsheba, but he also has been unable to tame the younger of his two dogs, which is still learning "the sheep-keeping business." Hardy accounts for the superiority of the older dog, George, by explaining that the original owner had had a "dreadful temper" and had disciplined the dog with staggering blows with the "sheep-crook." "Though old," Hardy concludes, "he was clever and trustworthy still" (5). The even-tempered Oak, who pities the sheep he has to butcher, has shown no comparable severity towards the younger dog. His willingness to let matters that demand "strategy" (5), like

the training of a sheep dog, take care of themselves is illustrated by his decision to go to sleep (again) even though the young dog has not answered his call. The result is that the dog, overeager from lack of discipline to do its job well, herds the sheep over a cliff.

Hardy does not mean, of course, to imply that Oak should have disciplined this dog as severely as the original owner did George. The novelist does not characterize this man as one of "inferior morals" in order to hold him up as a paradigm against whom to measure Oak. Hardy himself especially abhorred the abuse of animals--see, for example, his poem "Compassion." Indeed, he makes Oak's humaneness, which explains specifically his attitude towards the sheep and by extension his treatment of his dogs, a virtue. Nevertheless, the lack of strategy that results from Oak's humaneness--a characteristic similar to his even temper, which in turn derives from his inertia--makes him a bad farmer.

Even so, he does apparently kill the dog: "George's son [the dog] had done his work so thoroughly that he was considered too good a workman to live, and was, in fact, taken and tragically shot at twelve o'clock that same day" (5). Morrell wisely argues that it is not "out of character" for the humane Oak to kill this dog: "no good shepherd could have spared 'George's son's' life, and it

seems to me," Morrell continues, "that Oak's action was consistent with the general attitude in Far from the Madding Crowd that nature must be controlled" (100-101).

If Oak does prove himself in this one instance to be a good shepherd after he no longer has any sheep to herd, he remains at other times as sleepy as ever. After leaving the hiring fair, to which the loss of his sheep compels him to go, he promptly falls asleep in a wagon, which then takes him unawares to Weatherbury. Still, he is a changed man. Oak has learned that, strategy or no strategy, no one can avoid the "neutral-tinted haps and such" that Hardy maintains, in a late poem ("He Never Expected Much" [1886]), are the only things the world has promised anyone. Consequently, Oak is possessed of "a dignified calm he had never before known" and a sublime "indifference to fate" (6).

Oak's new attitude yields an indifference to personal misfortune that sharpens his sight to threats to the fortunes of others. A liminal figure, a man with choices to make, is an observer anyway; an observer with a dispassionate regard for his own self-interest is the ideal. So far, Oak's fundamental stasis, a characteristic also of rural societies, has worked negatively to keep him a shepherd even though his farming represented no real

break with his past. But as an observer Oak is served well by his respect for continuity, for it allows him to identify changeful situations--like Bathsheba's flirtation with Boldwood and her romance with Troy--that threaten, as he intuitively perceives, the healthy continuity of rural life.

Furthermore, as an observer unmindful of his self-interest--as something of an outsider by virtue of his perspective as well as his upbringing elsewhere--Oak can recognize and respond to the equally serious threat to rural health posed by the inertia of folk rather like himself--an inertia fostered by the same continuity that Oak innately wants preserved. Hardy burlesques these people, the rustics, by having one of them say, in reference to Nonconformists, "I bain't such a fool as to pretend that we who stick to the Church have the same chance as they, because we know we have not. But I hate a fellow who'll change his old ancient doctrines for the sake of getting to heaven" (42). Similarly but without apparent mockery, Hardy describes Oak as "a man who clung persistently to old habits and usages, simply because they were old" (49). The point of Hardy's differing attitude seems to be that while stasis, unchallenged, eventually leads to stagnation (as in the case of the rustics), it can, when menaced by change, generate a clannish impulse to

preserve tradition. Where regionalism is concerned, stasis, transformed into an active principle, becomes a clannish affirmation of a way of life that, because of its continuity, is forever tending towards stagnation. Thus stasis can be a positive as well as negative force.

In this context Oak's arrival at Weatherbury is a pivotal scene less because it reunites him with Bathsheba than because it dramatizes his transformation from a character whose stasis has been his downfall to one whose impulse to preserve and, if need be, restore the health of rural society becomes his strength. The previous episodes have revealed a character almost as sleepy as the culture he embodies--not even the loss of his sheep was enough to awaken him. To do so it takes a fire and "a remarkable confusion of purpose" on the part of the laborers who must try to put it out. Oak's perspective as an observer, particularly as a man at a transitional time of life when "his intellect and his emotions [are] clearly separated," generates his own swift and purposeful reaction. For Oak belongs to the same social class as this "assemblage" of men, the class that "casts its thought into the form of feeling, and its feelings into the form of commotion" (6). These are men whose lives have stagnated, whom an emergency has startled into motion.

Oak is now going to control the fire, rather than surrender to it, as he did when living in his portable hut. A good servant and a bad master, the fire here (as in the earlier episode) is a natural force, which uncontrolled will master man. A dominant image in Hardy's novels, fire--if it is a wildfire--often symbolizes riotous sexuality; and if it is a household fire, it symbolizes fertile domesticity. Yet Hardy makes it clear, in the scene at Norcombe Hill, that fire, especially a smoking one, can represent the often stupefying calm of nature--a calm, as Hardy puts it in "'According to the Mighty Working,'" that hides a "riot" and lulls the observer into inattentiveness (571). This characteristic of rural nature (which explains the indifference, in The Return of the Native, of the heathmen towards their work and also the fatalism of the Durbeyfields, in Tess, and other countryfolk) explains the incompetence in Far from the Madding Crowd of the Weatherbury rustics, who amusingly cannot get straight whether "[a] good master and a bad servant is fire" or "a bad servant and a good master" (6). Later in the novel, of course, the sexual fire of their mistress masters her, and only after she and Oak have made that elemental energy their servant does fertile domesticity prevail at Weatherbury.

It is almost as an artist that Oak overcomes the self-defeating inertia of rural folk much like himself and paradoxically preserves the regional life, whose strength is its tendency not to change, from the challenge of modernity, embodied by the socially vain and sexually restless Bathsheba and personified by the sexually cosmopolitan Troy. The novel ends happily with Oak's marriage to Bathsheba, who has discovered, with Oak's aid, her regional identity. This marriage, because it represents a victory of regionalism over rootlessness, is basically clannish. But there is no suggestion that it, like Jemima Hardy's clannishness, is sterile. The marriage preserves continuity, but both Oak--a rustic with a dedication to self-improvement--and Bathsheba--a country woman with some insight into urban life--bring the prospect of continuous revitalization to the stagnating community.

Even so, this victory is complicated by a quality of mind that apprehends continuity from not only a cultural but also an elemental perspective. For Hardy has infused Oak's moody temperament with a sense of cosmic alienation that denies the intrinsic worth of cultural values. This feeling of Oak's derives from his aesthetic appreciation of nature. But unlike Wordsworth, for example, who sees the beauty of nature not merely as an antidote to the bad art of city life but also as something to be comprehended by

the "individual Mind," Oak finds nature impressive because of the constriction that everything human suffers in its midst. Alone on starlit Norcombe Hill, Oak is

impressed . . . with the complete abstraction from all its compass of the sights and sounds of man. Human shapes, interferences, troubles, and joys were all as if they were not, and there seemed to be on the shaded hemisphere of the globe no sentient being save himself. (2)

And later, during the storm at Weatherbury, right as Oak is feeling aroused by the trembling of Bathsheba's "warm arm" in his hand, he thinks how "small and trifling" seem "love, life, everything human . . . in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated universe" (37).

The Oak who responds this way to nature is, however, the same one who tells time by the stars--who finds the starlit sky a "useful instrument" (2)--and who almost single-handedly saves the harvest from the destructive weather. Oak's perception of man's place in nature, which doubtless owes much to the intellectual climate of the second half of the century (as Millgate reports in his biography, Hardy claimed to be among the "earliest readers" of Darwin [90]), parallels Bathsheba's discovery of her elemental self, which exposes to the regional artist, which

she is, her debilitating vanity. From her discovery Bathsheba experiences a reconstitution of values. Oak's perception of man's relationship to nature effects a similar reconstitution of cultural values. Occasional though it is, Oak's vision corrects the regionalist's sometimes excessive respect for custom and tradition--the sort of respect implied, perhaps, by Tate's analysis of regionalism. Oak's sense of cosmic alienation understands that man relates to nature in no mutually amicable way, that cultural ties dissolve within the vastness of a universe that reduces men to mere biological facts, alienated therefore not only from their past--and so from each other--but also from pastoral, Romantic nature. Human values begin to take shape, then, only when men and women meet as elemental beings to perform together their elemental tasks.

"The Commonwealth of Hearts and Hands"

in The Return of the Native

For Blake, according to Northrop Frye, "real work" entails "making nature into the form of human life" (xxv). So, too, for Hardy--as when, in Far from the Madding Crowd, Oak and Bathsheba work together atop a rick to save their harvest from a storm. Their work to preserve domesticity amid a violent dark that threatens to efface the human look of the landscape is basically a dramatic form of mundane "homemaking." For Hardy, the home that a couple creates out of "Wessex nooks" is a work of art. The home as a work of art finds its fullest expression in "the commonwealth of hearts and hands," as Hardy describes, in The Return of the Native (Bk. 1, Ch. 7), a community bound together not only by the necessity of work in common but also by the "domestic emotions." In this novel occasional festivities, which bring the community together in play, represent a stylized "commonwealth of hearts and hands" and suggest emblematically how a healthy society ought to be working when it is not playing.

Hardy sees two obstacles to this work of homemaking. First, nature itself resists domestication--and no more tenaciously than does "untameable" Egdon Heath, the setting of Hardy's third Wessex novel (1.1). The heath embodies

geological time, which dwarfs human history as if it never had been. Second, the taming of wilderness merely complements man's simultaneous enactment of a psychological drama: the domestication of that dreamscape (embodied also by the heath) which is the haunt of "the man of prehistoric ages" who, according to Freud, "survives unchanged in our unconscious" ("Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" 231).

In The Return of the Native that drama, which brings self-integration, proves impossible for the native, Clym Yeobright, to enact. This Shelleyan idealist, who marries the sensual Eustacia Vye and sets up house with her amid the Egdon waste, has so close an attachment to his mother that he tends to repress his erotic feelings not only for her, of course, but also for his wife. To the idealist's distress, Eustacia's sensuality arouses his repressed sexuality. (It is the release of these feelings as creative energy that facilitates the complementary transformation of nature into art.) By attributing Clym's self-division in part to a mother-fixation, Hardy makes him an individual. By attributing that characteristic also to Clym's education and urban experience (whose emphasis on the life of the mind seems to deny the claims of the body), Hardy makes him typically modern. Averse to flesh and circumstance, the modern intellectual fears the self-integration enjoyed, as

Hardy surmises, by primal man. Hardy's analysis of the failure of Clym's marriage depicts pessimistically modern society as a fractured "commonwealth of hearts and hands," whose healing can begin only when lovers impart to their surroundings the "colour and cast" of their love ("At Castle Boterel" 352).

I

"Haggard" Egdon Heath contrasts with "the vineyards and myrtle gardens of South Europe," the site of a story-book golden age when it would have been inconceivable that the morally and intellectually superior human species had evolved from lower ones by means of natural selection. The "sombreness" of the heath would have been "distasteful to our race when it was young"--when, innocent of the origin of the species, it frolicked amid those "fair" and "charming" gardens to the south. If the late Victorians also found the unorthodox beauty of the heath displeasing, still they could see that it accorded "with man's nature--neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring." A later generation of readers would find its unorthodox beauty in accord with the amorality of the prehistoric man who endures "unchanged" amid the ahistorical terrain of modern man's unconscious. If Hardy's original audience

could not perceive the heath as a Freudian dreamscape, his readers could at least recognize it as a place, a Darwinian landscape, familiar to the human species in its prehistoric infancy (1.1).

Ian Gregor observes in The Great Web, "It is through the primal contrast of light and darkness that the novel begins to take shape" (83). This contrast juxtaposes the bonfires and a white road crossing the heath with the heath itself, which even during the day (except at the height of summer) is "a near relation of the night." It is a juxtaposition of civilization with "untameable" nature--a nature both inside and outside man, whose ability to tame the untameable is a measure of his creativity (1.1).

As the setting of the novel, the heath is an inhospitable landscape where (in Freud's words) "Man is not a being different from animals or superior to them; he himself originates in the animal race. . . . The accretions he has subsequently developed have not served to efface the evidences, both in his physical structure and in his mental dispositions, of his parity with them." Here is Freud defining "the biological blow," dealt by Darwin, "to human narcissism" ("One of the Difficulties of Psycho-Analysis" 6). Freud could be echoing Hardy, who reveals the same appreciation of Darwin later in the novel when he describes the denigrating effect of the setting on Clym's exalted

sense of self: "There was something its oppressive horizontality which . . . gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun" (3.5). In this place a human being may well appear "to be of no more account in life than an insect" (4.5). So Clym seems to his mother when she fails at first to recognize the furze-cutter as her son.

For Hardy the heath, whose "enemy" is "Civilization," serves as a rebuttal to the popular Victorian faith in Progress. Although this landscape embodies the "Black chaos" of the coming winter against which mankind instinctively and rightly rebels (1.3), the "ancient permanence" of the setting--"unaltered" since "prehistoric times"--gives "ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harrassed by the irrepressible New" (1.1). Still, he is a long way from proclaiming with the Wordsworth of The Recluse,

How exquisitely the individual Mind

 . . . to the external World
 Is fitted: --and how exquisitely, too--
 Theme this but little heard of among men--
 The external World is fitted to the Mind;
 And the creation (by no lower name
 Can it be called) which they when blended might

Accomplish . . .

("Home at Grasmere," lines 816-24)

For Egdon Heath has withstood whatever attempt man has made to create there a flourishing civilization or even to cultivate its soil. Man can expect no cooperation from "the external World": he must always be contending with it. To blend his mind with this landscape is either to imitate nature (whose calm is deceptive since it hides a "riot") or to die and so become physically one with the soil. Rainbarrow, an ancient burial mound, stands as a reminder of the return of "the individual Mind" to the vast unconsciousness of nature, and it contrasts with the vitality of the Guy Fawkes' Day celebration, which takes place thereon, as well as with the travel that occurs along the road below.

The first chapter, titled "A Face on which Time Makes but Little Impression," presents the heath as an ahistorical setting. But it concludes with a significant description of "an aged highway." As Hardy, two chapters later, sets the bonfires against the nighttime heath, here he juxtaposes with the landscape (its "minor features" obscured by the twilight) a road whose "white surface . . . remained almost as clear as ever" (1.1). The road has given "nature the form of civilized human intelligence" (Frye xxv)--as does the famous jar in a poem, "Anecdote of

the Jar," by Wallace Stevens (76). Placed "upon a hill" in Tennessee, "It made the slovenly wilderness / Surround that hill." For Hardy the transformation, which a manmade object can work on nature, is inconclusive--not so for Stevens. There is no mistaking his jar for a natural object: it "did not give of bird or bush, / Like nothing else in Tennessee." In contrast, Hardy's white road has come "by long continuance" to look like a product of nature. How is the human mind responding to nature when it apprehends a dark landscape, bisected by a white road, and sees that highway too as a natural phenomenon? The answers to this question reveal much about the characters in the novel.

Even though the contrast draws attention to the success of something manmade in establishing itself there, the presence of the highway does not make it appear that human hands contoured the heath. While Stevens's jar holds "dominion" over the surrounding wilderness, the "oppressive horizontality" of the heath, which Clym later finds overpowering, challenges the observer's attentiveness to the contrast between the road and the rural landscape. Figurative as well as literal, temporal as well as spatial, this "horizontality" also discourages human efforts to tame the "untameable" heath. Human successes seem puny, so long

does it take to realize them here, and thus work--as with the heathmen--becomes indifferent.

Gregor, who identifies the "subject matter" of the novel as "the gradual and painful emergence of consciousness out of unconsciousness," points out that "the human drama" begins on the highway (84). It is as if this white road symbolized the human consciousness. That the appearance of an exclusively human property appears a "product" (Hardy's word) of insentient nature reflects the human tendency to attribute a moral character to the external world. To conceive of nature as a being in whose mind the human drama exists as a thought is to view violent weather as evidence of a capricious and vindictive god, morally inferior and physically superior to man. The unhealthy fatalism of Eustacia, who thinks of the heath as her own "cruel taskmaster" (3.4), is symptomatic of anthropomorphism of this sort: "Instead of blaming herself for the issue, she laid the fault upon the shoulders of some indistinct colossal Prince of the World who had framed her situation and ruled her lot" (4.8). If Eustacia does die a suicide, it is partly because her anthropomorphism has left her with no will to struggle against the stormy heath, whose severity seems a measure of the vindictiveness of the external world.

Instead of feeling victimized by nature, the barbarian will derive contentment from an imperial nature whose profligacy images his own. Sometimes Clym feels this way. More often, however, he sees the vegetable realm and that of man as utterly distinct. This view is symptomatic of what Allen Tate calls the "angelic imagination" and is typical of intellectuals like Clym, whose abstraction encourages the idealistic notion that the conflict between primitive man and the elements saw the subjugation of nature--which thus freed the mind, in Tate's words, from its "servitude to the natural world," from "the limitations of sense" (Essays 429). Hardy's description of the scene serves as a warning: wilderness subverts all but the most persistent of human endeavors, and this subversion may simply affect the way one looks at nature. Moreover, the necessity of persistence points to an eternal antagonism between man and nature.

Wordsworth conceived of the "external World" as "exquately fitted" to the mind. If Hardy's description of Egdon Heath opposes that concept, there does run throughout the novel a realization (which pervades the opening chapter) that the human brainpan contains some dark terrain--a dreamscape--analogous to the heath.

It is first through the relation of the heath to nighttime that the physical setting begins to dissolve into psychological terrain. Although the novel opens on an afternoon, darkness already has fallen on, or rather risen from the heath: "The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy." The two darks merging, the heath embodies the night. Except in July sun, Egdon wears an aspect of night. Thanks to its "complexion," Hardy observes, "it could . . . retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread" (1.1).

As dreamscapes ought to do, "when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen." Its "glory" having commenced at sundown, now the "Egdon waste" "begins / Its serious existence" (as Randall Jarrell writes of a wood, also a dreamscape, in his poem "The House in the Wood" [322]). Moreover, this "serious existence" announces itself to a profound, interior sense apart from sight: the heath "could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen" (1.1). Hardy does not describe the sensation, but perhaps it is analogous to the "night-rhythm, something felt in pulse not word," the "anapestic sound" (favored by Hardy the poet) from which emerge the "nightmarish narratives" of James Dickey (The Early Motion

vii). In the work of both Jarrell and Dickey--latterday Southerners who came of age during the urbanization of the region--contact with the land means contact also with that ahistorical realm where one's amoral self resides. This oftentimes nocturnal contact effects a reconstitution of the regional self, which would otherwise owe its identity solely to the unifying political and social concerns of the area. Symbolic of a return to the childhood of the race, it may take the form of a regression to childhood or--since the child, himself a sexual being, feels with primitive man no aversion towards his kinship with lower animals--a release of heretofore suppressed sexuality. This regression throws the civilized intelligence into contact with the amoral being in its unconscious--a being that may be a god as well as a beast, since the natural and the supernatural are two sides of the same amoral coin. (Totemism recognizes this fact with gods that look like beasts.) The friction from this contact generates the creative energy necessary for art.

That concept of the creative process seems to have come to Hardy while writing Far from the Madding Crowd. For it is through Bathsheba's confrontation with her elemental self that she discovers her regional identity. Moreover, the psychological setting of the two scenes that dramatize her self-recognition corresponds to Egdon-as-

dreamscape: her struggle against the potentially disastrous storm with Oak atop the threatened ricks, and later her confrontation with and flight from Troy and her subsequent wakeful night out of doors contending with a storm within herself. These episodes occur when everyone else is asleep--it is as if Bathsheba herself is having nightmares. Together they involve her return to a nature that is anything but idyllic and her regression into an other-than Wordsworthian childhood. (Her plea to Troy to kiss her as he has kissed the corpse of Fanny Robin is "childlike" in its "simplicity" [43].) Her sexual arousal challenges social restraints, and with Oak, whose hands join hers in preserving her farm, it takes the form of creative energy.

Egdon Heath embodies those kinds of nightmare. Hardy could not be more explicit than when he frankly identifies the stormy heath as the "original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster" (1.1). This dreamscape is as much the setting of Bathsheba's experiences that oppose her civilized self and her primitive one as it is the future setting of Eustacia's disastrous flight during the storm from Mistover to her midnight rendezvous with Wildeve. The setting is both external and psychological; there is no difference between

"the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without" (5.7). For Eustacia nightmare and wakefulness have become indistinguishable; her ego, to paraphrase Freud, has ceased to be mistress of its own house. Unlike Eustacia, Bathsheba contends inadvertently with her elemental nature by working the farm, and the psychological strength gained thereby proves her ally--as does Oak, the ideal countryman. But Eustacia has staked her sanity on dreams of life amid the social whirl of Paris, as if by moving from Egdon she could escape the stormy dark within herself. Bathsheba and Oak join together to preserve order. In Wessex "the commonwealth is one of hearts and hands" (1.7). But the rift between Eustacia and Clym, who participates in his wife's nightmare by doing with her a sort of shadow dance, has so widened that they cannot join hands across it.

On Egdon Heath the lighting of "Fawkes fires," as Dylan Thomas calls them (in his poem "In the White Giant's Thigh" [205]), is analogous to working together to cultivate the otherwise "untameable" ground. Tending this ground as the heathfolk do by cutting furze, which grows wild, reduces men to insects. But the lighting of bonfires, which tame the dark that Egdon Heath embodies, represents man's successful--if temporary--conquest of nature. This conquest by the community as a whole fosters

social coherence. Moreover, since Hardy refers to the lighting of the Fawkes fires as "the custom of the country"--a custom whose lineage goes back to primitive times--it also fosters continuity--"the continuity," as Robert S. Dupree contends that fire represents for Allen Tate, "of human energy from generation to generation" (67).

The lighting of the bonfires in The Return of the Native allegorically dramatizes the rise of civilization in a way that parallels Freud's notion (in Civilization and Its Discontents) that it was made possible by "the renunciation of instinct" (instinct being the characteristic that connects man to lower forms of animal life [44]). Freud, who identifies as a homoerotic competitive urge the impulse of primitive man to extinguish a fire, concludes, "By damping down the fire of his own sexual excitation, he had tamed the natural force of fire" (37). Now Hardy's heathmen may not be renouncing homoerotic competition; but by cooperating in the lighting of the bonfires, they do transform fire as a symbol of consuming erotic desire into fire as a symbol of fertile domesticity, which encourages procreation, social coherence, and continuity. Less specifically the harnessing of fire means for Hardy's characters the abandonment of the instinctual life in general--or to put the matter in Romantic terms, the renunciation of the

natural life; for Hardy's ideal man emphatically is not "Nature's best philosopher." On Guy Fawkes' Day the heathfolk reenact collectively--they work together to dramatize--primitive man's "renunciation of instinct."

This drama begins when the heathfolk appear on the scene with furze faggots so carried that each person looks like "a bush on legs" (1.3). Thus costumed, they represent man in his original, natural state, a state he shared with other animals. So it is a revelation of the heathfolk's humanity when they throw down the faggots and set them ablaze. These fires are destructive only in that they represent man's rejection of a life spent amidst a profligate nature, which natural man could not tame. The bonfires do not so much destroy the heath, which they consume as fuel, as create a new landscape by "making it into the form of human life."

If one cannot tame this wild ground by planting crops, one can domesticate the dark, which it embodies, by lighting fires upon it. How exactly does the setting of Fawkes fires order this nocturnal landscape? Lighting a bonfire brings a community together around the fire and binds it with other communities throughout the area. Egdon joins a network of communication that the fires create among widespread localities. The nature of this communication, as Hardy later points out, is that an

observer can identify the fuel from the appearance of the flames, and thus he can deduce something about the district where the bonfire is burning. "Foreign" terrain thus becomes familiar.

Communication among separate and distinct localities, as Hardy meanwhile implies, accompanies the introduction of history to an otherwise ahistorical environment. The lighting of bonfires, which signifies man's rebellion against his natural state, introduces to the Darwinian landscape a concept of time comprehensible to human beings as geological time is not, and this concept of time--history--makes of human beings a family of man. Or so it is implied by a curious analogy, which relates the telling of time with a consciousness of place: "as the hour may be told on a clock-face when the figures themselves are invisible, so did the men recognize the locality of each fire by its angle and direction, though nothing of the scenery could be viewed" (1.3). Without the fires the various communities remain disjunct, without a common standard of time. As Hardy later observes,

The time at any moment was a number of varying doctrines professed by the different hamlets, some of them having originally grown up from a common root, and then become divided by

secession, some having been alien from the beginning. (2.5)

The contrast between the firelight and the blackened heath recalls the earlier contrast between the white road--white as light--and the darkening landscape. In fact the firelight, whose strands crisscross the landscape, is analogous to the highway, which cuts across "the lower levels of the heath, from one horizon to another" (1.1). Both the network of firelight and the white road make nature accommodate man. The fires, which communicate with each other, function much as does the road: travel, when undertaken by a representative of his culture, is a form of communication that familiarizes one culture with another. Furthermore, since the heath embodies the night, the heathmen--by lighting a fire which connects with other fires--are creating a terrestrial version of the constellated night sky.

As the introduction of historical time to Egdon links the heathfolk with the people of other locales, so does it link the heathfolk with their earliest forebears. And both effects owe a large debt to custom--specifically to those customs which manifest a society's rebellion against the "black chaos" within the individual. These customs transcend the culture that gives them their current, topical meaning, as Hardy writes of the Fawkes fires: "it

is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about the Gunpowder Plot"

(1.3). The irony, perhaps not lost on Hardy, is that these fires, which signify man's "Promethean rebelliousness" against the earth whose darkness envelops him, celebrate the execution of a man who led a rebellion in the cause of religious freedom against a repressive monarch, whose claim of "divine right" kinned him with Blake's Nobodaddy, the inscrutably capricious, tyrannical god of the Old Testament who evolved from early man's personification of the equally mysterious and overpowering forces of nature (Frye xxiv).

By linking the Christian world with the pagan, Hardy like other Victorians (the late Tennyson in "Demeter and Persephone," Arnold in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," Swinburne in "Hymn to Proserpine," Rosetti in "The Burden of Nineveh") implicitly challenges the traditional claims of Christianity, whose "unknown" God Hardy caricatures in a number of poems--this culture, too, will pass. Thus the claim of a cultural habit, of a custom, retains its imperative (manifest in the enthusiasm of its observance) when it links one historical age to another by expressing man's "Promethian rebelliousness." Conversely, a custom or tradition that fails to transcend

its current context has no valid claim on one's fidelity. Hardy's comment on mumming, "a fossilized survival," relates to the "traditional pastime" in general: it "is carried on with a stolidity and absence of stir which sets one wondering why a thing that is done so perfunctorily should be kept up at all" (2.4). In contrast is the enthusiastic celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day, which liberates "the fettered gods of the earth," who "say, Let there be light" (1.3). These are Hardy's gods, the creative individuals that all men and women potentially are.

The effect of the bonfires on the heathfolk's appearance and behavior is immediate. The "nimble flames" both exaggerate the grotesque, natural aspect of the heathfolk's features--thus making jaws appear "cavernous" and wrinkles like "ravines"--and transfigure this human clay into "preternatural" objects of light (1.3). In short, the flames emphasize the contrast between man's natural self, which Hardy's figures of speech associate with the dark, surrounding landscape, and his spiritual self, which the novelist connects with the firelight. Just as the heath is both inside and outside man, the fire, as Hardy shows through its effect on Grandfer Cattle's behavior, is (in Gregor's words) "both inside and outside the man"--as Gregor astutely observes, "it has warmed him

into consciousness of himself and he seeks expression in dance and song," in other words, in art (83). Through creative expression man achieves the integration of his natural and spiritual selves.

If Hardy sees the harnessing of fire as the original act of civilization, then he surely regards dance, together with its musical accompaniment, as the first work of art. As if the communal act of lighting the bonfire makes possible an individual creative response, no sooner has the fire on Rainbarrow begun to blaze than Grandfer Cattle begins dancing around it "a private minuet." Dance does seem in fact to have originated as an expression of personal pleasure, just as Grandfer Cattle's minuet results from his "cheerfulness," his "delight" (1.3). Later, dance acquired a purpose related to the tribe as a whole ("Dance," Britannica). And here on Rainbarrow the heathfolk's inadvertent reenactment of the birth of civilization includes a dramatization of this stage in the evolution of dance. Although Grandfer Cattle's minuet is "private," it is nonetheless expressive of cultural tradition, thanks to the ballad to which he dances, singing it himself. This ballad, to whose composition generations have contributed, also brings history to Egdon. As an expression of cultural tradition, Grandfer Cattle's minuet invites participation by the entire tribe. Art is becoming

custom. After a while Timothy Fairway, who has made fun of Grandfer Cantle's dancing, starts a dance that immediately proves "infectious" (1.3).

Just as the dancing fires throughout the countryside weave a web of familiarity among the various parishes, so does this "private" dance inspire the participation of the group, thereby establishing what Hardy later calls a "commonwealth of hearts and hands" (1.7). This pregnant phrase implies that social order, cultural well-being, depends fundamentally on the warmth two people feel for each other, which displays itself in a joining of hands, whether it is literal as in a dance, figurative as in a common task, or both literal and figurative as in a marriage (unlike that of Clym and Eustacia) where hands remain "joined" beyond the ceremony itself as the couple enters a dance of life, a life of working together.

II

Traditional celebrations, which bring society together in play, show in a heightened, emblematic way how a healthy society ought to be working when it is not playing. The question now to be answered is whether or not this culture, where custom seems so alive, is truly healthy. The answer is No--even though the celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day is

emblematic of cultural well-being, for it should not be merely emblematic; its energy should radiate throughout the texture of daily life. To light a fire is to establish order amid chaos; the bonfires ought to blaze figuratively year-round. Other festive occasions do revive "the commonwealth of hearts and hands." There are the "gipsyings," such as the one to which Clym should accompany Eustacia, so that their hands, instead of hers and those of Wildeve (encountered there by chance), might join in a dance; and there are the Maypole dances, such as the one where Thomasin's servant girl loses her mistress's glove, which Diggory Venn, the reddleman-turned-dairy farmer, retrieves, thereby joining hands figuratively with Thomasin in a dance. But these social events happen intermittently and have no counterpart in the daily lives of the people.

Readers ought to be able to imagine the life of this community woven into a tapestry or pictured in a mural and recognize that an individual's occupation accomplishes daily for him--and by extension for the community as a whole--much the same as commemorative festivals accomplish for the community and indirectly for the individual. Unfortunately the work of the heathfolk tends to be indifferent, in contrast to their play, which--though traditional--shows a lively spontaneity. Festivals give to

their lives a meaning, which their similarly traditional occupations fail to approximate.

Take for example the odd jobs the heathmen perform for the wealthier members of the community like Captain Vye-- such as "that of bringing together and building into a stack the furze faggots which Humphrey [one of the heathmen] had been cutting for the captain's use during the foregoing five days." Although the winter solstice has come, birds, rabbits, and even some reptiles remain about, and here "any man could imagine himself to be Adam." This place, which seems freshly created by God from primordial chaos, invites the ordering artistry of man--of the first poet, Adam, whose creative task it was to assign names to the animals and to "fill the earth and subdue it." But as for the "ephemeral operations" of the heathmen--"they were activities which, beside those of a town, a village, or even a farm, would have appeared as the ferment of stagnation merely, a creeping of the flesh of somnolence" (2.1). Furze-cutting is equally "trifling." Those who do it appear as Clym does later: "a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment" (4.5). To tame this landscape as festive fires tame the dark means awakening it from its massive, apparently contagious slumber.

As Gregor has noticed, the heathmen do not work so much as function as "commentators and messengers." They have, he writes, virtually "no independent life of their own such as [the locals] had in Far from the Madding Crowd" (109). Of course, the main story, the romance of Clym and Eustacia, necessarily pushes the heathmen into the wings. In no other Wessex novel, however, do such folk as these function so exclusively as a chorus. Still, their commentary comes to readers as often as not while they are working. Thus can readers discern both the kind of work they do and their attitude towards it.

It is while the heathmen are stacking wood for Captain Vye that the reader, along with Eustacia, overhears their account of Clym's promising past, which, they observe, gives him something in common with the captain's educated granddaughter. Contrast the heathmen's indifference towards their work with their interest in a possible romance between Clym and Eustacia: the heathmen attach an importance to this couple's story which they fail to attach to theirs. The heathmen have always believed that the heath is no place for the likes of Clym--for people with his learning. (They regard Eustacia as his perfect mate, whose own learning has fueled her desire to be elsewhere.) They disagree with Captain Vye who opines that Clym "ought never to have left home." As one of them replies, "'Tis a

good thing for the feller . . . A sight of times better to be selling diments than nobbling about here" (2.1). If this assertion reveals their high opinion of Clym, it shows their low opinion of themselves and of this place. Here the gifted young are expected to leave, and if they succeed elsewhere, they will not voluntarily return. The locals expected "something" of Clym, knew "that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born," and now they hold that if he were fulfilling those expectations by "doing well elsewhere," he "wouldn't bide here two or three weeks for nothing" (3.1). The heathfolk, then, recognize their own inertia, but do not see their own moving away as even a matter for consideration. (Nor do they think motion here worthwhile.) They seem further to recognize that "projects" originate elsewhere; here there are no goals.

The feeling of the heathmen that Clym and Eustacia's story belongs to another setting accords with their indifference towards their work. Clym and Eustacia belong elsewhere because their story is important and the heath-- as an embodiment of the "yawning blankness" to which Hardy refers in one of his poems ("The Going" [338])--diminishes whatever transpires in its midst. The heathmen, because they have no story themselves, belong right here. Hardy's poem "I Have Lived with Shades" (184-5) makes it clear that he would have agreed with the Sophocles of a provocative

essay by E. R. Dodds who asks, "If every man could tear away the last veils of illusion, if he could see human life as time and the gods see it, would he not see that against that tremendous background all the generations of men are as if they had not been" (229)? At the same time Hardy could write a novel, Two on a Tower (1882), in which his plan was

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.

Hardy could agree with Sophocles that the greatness of an individual life is an illusion; still, he would insist that it is an illusion on which all men must act. Inhabitants of a place that embodies geological time, the heathmen see themselves as if they have not been. To Hardy the secret of being human is to perceive one's insignificance and also see that a patch of ground and not the cosmos is one's to cultivate.

Hardy calls the heath "untameable." Essentially it is. Still, it can be cultivated temporarily. Persistent human hands did succeed with the tract around the Quiet Woman Inn, which the rootless Wildeve now owns. This tract

is ironically called Wildeve's Patch--ironically since the current owner had nothing to do with its cultivation.

Hardy describes it as

a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of the labor; the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honors due to those who had gone before. (1.4)

The lecherous, restless Wildeve imitates the profligacy of nature. An exploiter like Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd, he is rootless or at most capable of putting down the incredibly short roots of some parasitic plants, riders of every passing wind. (These kinds of weed are analogous to brush fires, spread by the winds of chance and change.) Hardy also draws attention to an enclosed piece of land near Eustacia's dwelling, which shows "evidence of having once been tilled" (1.6). Thus it is not the impossibility of tilling this land that keeps it barren but rather its extraordinary stubbornness, which subverts all but the most persistent of human efforts to tame it. As for the paddock at the Vyes', "the heath and fern had insidiously crept in,

and were asserting their old supremacy" (1.6). Neither the old sea captain nor his queenly granddaughter feels that he or she has any stake in the cultivation of the heath.

Inviolateness is one of the characteristics of the heath that Hardy singles out in the long, descriptive first chapter--the "ancient permanence" that gives "ballast to the mind adrift on change and harassed by the irrepressible New" (1.1). This observation relates to no one character's mind in the novel. Not even Clym's intellect, which knows the "New," is "adrift"; it is rather too well fixed. But there is the Clym whose mind, when it is feverish first with a "sweet" and later with a bitter passion towards Eustacia, experiences the effect of "the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which having defied the cataclysmal onsets of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man" (5.2). First the "oppressive horizontality" of the heath diminishes his desire for Eustacia, whom he had just persuaded to set a date for their wedding (3.5). Then later, following the revelation from Johnny Nunsuch that Eustacia, after admitting Wildeve into the house, had refused to open the door to Mrs. Yeobright, the "vast impassivity" of the heath (which a reference to the earlier scene clearly connects with the negative "oppressive

horizontalities") similarly "enervates" a far more bitter "passion" (5.3).

How does "the imperturbable countenance of the heath" affect those whose minds are neither "adrift on change," "harassed by the irrepressible New," nor feverish with sweet or bitter passion? On the minds of the heathfolk the "horizontalities," the "impassivity," of the heath proves stultifying. Just as the heath makes the road look like a natural phenomenon by dulling the attentiveness of the observer, the heath also insinuates itself into the brains of those who have never known another setting and renders them incapable of distinguishing their human consciousness from its "massive slumber."

Dark, infertile Egdon Heath may be the most significant setting in the Wessex novels, with respect to Hardy's concept of regionalism as the realization that the locus of human vitality is man's fundamentally antagonistic relationship with nature. Here man can never stray far from the primitive response to nature of either lighting a fire to tame the dark or nurturing the stubborn soil. Here every creative act sets man against nature. The problem is that the dominant characteristic of the heath, its "repose"--"not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness" (1.2)--stills not only hands but also minds, ultimately destroying the

attentiveness that here especially the work of hands demands. Mentally the heathmen have become as horizontal as the "arena" of their lives is physically. To awaken it from its apparent slumber, they must also awaken from theirs.

If their celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day, whose fires both exaggerate their grotesque physical features and excite their spirits, makes them whole, then the heath unlit by such fires encourages their awareness of themselves as natural men, whose work is not the creative man's "response to his . . . desire to see the world in human form" but rather an animal's (or insect's) response to physical "need" (Frye xxv).

The disjunction between those activities that make men whole and those that merely answer to a physical need stands out in The Return of the Native as it does not in Far from the Madding Crowd, where the rustics are no less inert than the heathmen. At Weatherbury (the setting of the earlier novel) a great barn becomes a monument to the fusion of spiritual and naturalistic values thanks to Hardy's description of it as a cathedral. The agricultural operations therein approximate a worship service. There to mobilize the rustics and to order their lives are Gabriel Oak, who personifies what the great barn symbolizes, and

Bathsheba, a farmer herself--both of whom bring to the remote and backward area a critical perspective that comes from education and from experiences elsewhere (though not in so distant or fashionable a setting as Paris). Egdon contains no so conveniently symbolic structure as the great barn nor, in Clym and Eustacia, a couple to create of the heathmen a community of laborers analogous to the "communion of saints," the body of believers that worship together in a church. The helping hand that Clym extends to the heathmen who are trying to retrieve a bucket from the captain's well proves ineffectual--in dramatic contrast to the aid that the commanding Oak, upon his arrival at Weatherbury, gives to the disorganized rustics who are trying to put out a fire.

What would it take to invigorate the heathmen? Since those who live in the country must work literally at ground level, "horizontal" characterizes rural life in general. From this perspective the surroundings are sure to loom large. Some settings, like Weatherbury, do yield more readily than others to cultivation. But nature everywhere seeks to erase all evidence of man. And it is within that vast unconsciousness, as under Rainbarrow, that horizontal man at last reposes. So deeply rooted are the heathmen in this place that the characteristic somnolence of the heath infects them. It has become their psychological terrain.

They may light fires atop Rainbarrow once a year, but for the rest of the year they might as well lie under it as perform odd jobs for those who have no interest in either lighting bonfires or tilling the soil. It is impossible to transform their psychological terrain into a garden of "green thought" without transforming their waste land of furze into a "green shade." Even fertile Weatherbury demands a Gabriel Oak whose self-education not only has enriched his mind but also has taught him how better to use his hands.

Improvement of the heathfolk's primitive existence requires practical skills, and not "learning." They may not know what tools they need, but they know Clym's scheme cannot supply them. They may assert, as does Grandfer Cattle, "ah, I should like to have all that's under that young man's hair" (1.3), but they express contempt towards this same Clym's plan to teach them what he learned in Paris. As one of them says, "'Tis good-hearted of the young man . . . But, for my part, I think he had better mind his business" (3.1). Of education they exclaim in amazement, "How people do strive after it and get it!" because they have seen "learning," as in the case of Wildeve (an engineer-turned-publican), prove of no practical use (1.3).

Hardy's assessment of Clym's flawed project acknowledges the perhaps unfortunate fact that an education suited to the needs of this class of people must have material improvement as its aim:

In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least . . . and one of those stages is almost surely to be worldly advanced. . . . To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has long been accustomed. (3.2)

Freud similarly describes, in Civilization and Its Discontents, the physical state of society that makes possible the "esteem and encouragement of man's higher mental activities--his intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements--" and the elevation of "ideas" (such as "religious systems," "speculations of philosophy," and "what might be called man's ideals") to the "leading role in human life." All this can happen, writes Freud, only when "everything which can assist in the exploitation of the earth by man in his protection against the forces of nature--everything, in short, which is of use to him--is attended to and effectively carried out" (39-41). For the

heathfolk worldly advancement depends on their "exploitation" of especially stubborn ground, which Clym must facilitate if ideas are to assume the leading role in their lives. Unfortunately education as Clym, as well as the heathfolk, conceives of it has no such practical aim.

III

Ideas acquired their "leading role" in Clym's life during his time in France, the birthplace of the Age of Reason: "Much of [his intellectual] development he may have owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time" (3.2). An asceticism inherited from his mother no doubt contributed to his idealism. But his transformation from ascetic to idealist came with the physical ease of his life in an urban center, which as such embodied man's successful "exploitation" of nature. In Paris no one's livelihood involved a daily battle with the elements--and Clym's least of all: "the idlest, vainest, most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to" (3.1). True, "Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it" (2.6). But the diamond trade spared fuel for his ever-expanding life of the mind.

Thanks to his studious life in Paris, Clym returns to Egdon an idealist and not a mere ascetic like his mother, who self-sacrificed for the worldly advancement of her son. He expresses sentiments shared by her when he asserts, "I cannot enjoy delicacies; good things are wasted upon me. Well, I ought to turn that defect to advantage, and by being able to do without what other people require I can spend what such things cost upon anybody else" (3.2). But it is not the life of "good things" (which he is denying himself) that he means to provide the heathfolk. It is rather his life of the mind.

Hardy implies that Clym lacks interest in his physical existence and may even deplore the attachment of his intellect to a mortal body: Clym's face, "the typical countenance of the future," betrays his "view of life as a thing to be put up with"--a modern attitude that is "replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations" (3.1). Clym's aversion towards that part of himself shared with all of mutable nature makes him a philosopher and not an artist. For, as Hardy observes, "the philosopher regrets that thinkers are but perishable tissue, the artist that perishable tissue has to think" (2.6).

The philosopher's regret inspires Shelley's assertion that the singing skylark never was a bird but rather "an

unbodied joy." Hardy's characterization of Clym challenges the idealism of that Romantic poet, whose characterization of his own Prince Athanase, for example, acknowledges the physical cost of idealism but refuses to let wasting flesh argue against an exclusive life of the mind. Although the physical decay of Shelley's character has advanced further than that of Hardy's, the philosophical Clym has much in common with the Prince. "Philosophy's accepted guest" (line 15), Prince Athanase is "a youth, who, as with toil and travel, / Had grown quite weak and gray before his time" (1-2). While the precise cause of his decay baffles his friends, they nevertheless perceive his self-division, "That there was drawn an adamantine veil // Between his heart and mind,--both unrelieved / Wrought in his brain and bosom separate strife" (86-9). As with Clym who "loved his own kind" (3.2) even though his "look suggested isolation" (2.6) and whose erroneous "conviction" it is that "the want of most men [is] knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence" (3.2), so the "soul" of Prince Athanase

had wedded Wisdom, and her dower
 Is love and justice, clothed in which he sate
 Apart from men, as in a lonely tower,

Pitying the tumult of their dark estate.--

(31-4)

When Clym's blindness, the darkening of his own "estate," compels him to work at ground level amid the heathmen's dark estate, his "look of isolation" becomes one of belonging. Meanwhile he takes after his mother, a curate's daughter, who "had singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it" (3.3).

Clym refuses to see that his mother's desire for his material success tacitly acknowledges the legitimate claims of the physical life. Otherwise, he is so much his mother's son--and not his farmer father's--that an examination of her character throws light on his own and curiously clarifies his interest in Eustacia, who resembles Mrs. Yeobright in superficial ways. This resemblance explains how so sensual a woman as Eustacia (for whom, in the beginning, Clym's "love was as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura" [3.4]) can inspire in Clym the same unearthly love that he feels for his mother.

It may be that the singularity of Mrs. Yeobright's insight into life derives from her failure to mix with it (which Hardy attributes to her comparatively high birth). Her view resembles that of an urban planner who, having left the fieldwork to others, digests data (such as that

contained in the famous "blue books" of the Victorian period). From these data he formulates a theory upon which he then bases social policy. "What was the great world to Mrs. Yeobright?" Hardy asks:

A multitude whose tendencies could be perceived, though not its essences. Communities were seen by her as from a distance; she saw them as . . . vast masses of beings, jostling, zigzagging, and processioning in definite directions, but whose features are indistinguishable by the very comprehensiveness of the view. (3.3)

This passage anticipates a later one, which follows her pitiable departure from Clym's house, and which also shows her determination to avoid joining the "never-ending and heavy-laden throng" of humanity--as symbolized in the later passage by "a colony of ants." She gazes "down upon" this "fourmillant cite" (as Baudelaire might have termed it) as if "observing a city street from the top of a tower," and her determination "to obtain . . . thorough rest" not only from her "physical and emotional exertions" but also from this vision is rewarded by the sight of a heron (which could pass as a Shelleyan "blithe Spirit" as "bright sunbeams" suffuse its dripping wet plumage): "Up in the zenith where he was seemed a free and happy place,

away from all contact with the earthly ball to which she was pinioned;" and like the Shelley of "To a Skylark," who wishes he "could scorn / Hate, and pride, and fear" as the bird can scorn the "ground" (91-2), Mrs. Yeobright "wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface and fly as he flew then" (4.6).

Clym, whose socialistic wish it is "to raise the class at the expense of individuals," has his mother's abstract mind. His idealism sacrifices individual welfare to a concept of social welfare, and the physically wasting Clym "was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed" (3.2). If Clym is to be the first such "unit" (a word significant for its clinical associations) Eustacia is to be the second.

If Hardy's portrait of Clym does treat of the self-consuming idealism of a Prince Athanase, then perhaps like the Prince or the youth in Alastor (who served as model for the Prince), Clym is searching, when he meets Eustacia, for "the One whom he may love." To Prince Athanase, as Mary Shelley describes (in a note) her husband's plan for the unfinished poem, this One "appears . . . to embody his ideal of love and beauty . . . [but] proves to be Pandemos, or the earthly and unworthy Venus; who, after disappointing his cherished dreams and hopes, deserts him" (158-9). When Clym recognizes Eustacia as a "cultivated woman" disguised

as the Turkish Knight, he certainly sees her not as "Queen of Night" but as a kindred, enlightened spirit (2.6). When he learns of her victimization by exactly the sort of primitive superstition his educational scheme aims to root out, his sympathy prompts him to wonder, "Do you think she would like to teach children" (3.2)? Almost immediately thereafter he offers her a place in his scheme, and then defends his contemplation of marriage against his mother's wishes by citing Eustacia's "excellent" education (3.3). If the ascetic-turned-idealist felt, in Paris, cut off from his past by the contemporaneity of his thought, then he can recover that lost continuity by winning his mother's endorsement of his "project" or, failing that, by enlisting a helpmate whom he can love as he does his mother.

The same word, "genteel" (1.3), that applies to Mrs. Yeobright applies to the Vyes: "They were the only genteel people of the district except the Yeobrights" (1.10). Eustacia's costly education (1.7) has made her the "cultivated woman" whom Clym instantly perceives her to be. It is probably Eustacia's gentility (which contributes to her reserve towards the "inferior inhabitants" [1.10]) that later makes her "of the same mind" with Mrs. Yeobright as regards Clym's future, material well-being (3.4).

Hardy writes of Clym,

When he looked from the heights . . . he could not help indulging in a barbarous satisfaction at observing that, in some of the attempts at reclamation from the waste, tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the fern and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves. (3.2)

Most of the time Clym sees the vegetable and human realms as utterly distinct--a view symptomatic of what Tate has called the "angelic mind." As Hardy insists, however, Clym's angelism coexists with barbarism, which derives contentment from nature whose profligacy images that of the barbaric, natural man. Clym's "barbarous satisfaction" wells from his repressed erotic instincts, which urge his union with primitive Mother Earth.

"The man of prehistoric ages [who] survives," as Freud contends, "unchanged in our unconscious" finds in the heath an answer to a physical need left unsatisfied by Clym's "undemonstrable" love for his mother and his "chaste" love for an idealized Eustacia. If his relation to the scene--he views it from the "heights"--suggests a godlike detachment from humanity, it does so because that prehistoric man is an apotheosis of Clym's repressed, sexual aggressiveness, an enemy of civilization and the natural mate of Eustacia, "Queen of Night." If Clym as

"modern intellectual man" sees the "cultivated" and estranged Eustacia as angelic, a soul-mate to himself, Clym as barbarian feels drawn to the Eustacia who personifies perpetually nocturnal Egdon Heath.

This "Queen of Night"--whose hair "closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow"--"had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone" (1.7). Just as the heath appears asleep, Eustacia appears lethargic. However, "her apparent languor did not arise from a lack of force" (3.3). When she enters the novel, a "figure against the sky," her emotional state is potentially eruptive: "she had been existing in a suppressed state, and not in one of languor, or stagnation" while surveying the scene for the approach of Wildeve, the former lover whom her bonfire is meant to attract (1.6).

These passages bring to mind the seemingly double character of Egdon Heath. It is distinguished from other landscapes not only by "the apparent repose of incredible slowness" (1.2)--the characteristic that has stultified the natives--but also by the "intensity" of its "winter darkness" (which Eustacia has absorbed), "tempests, and mists": "The storm," writes Hardy, "was its lover, and the wind its friend" (1.1). In other words, the storm allies itself with all the other characteristics of the heath that make it "untameable"--to oppose civilization, its "enemy."

Thus when "wet and boisterous" weather destroys the summer calm, the open heath experiences only a "light caress" while a cultivated portion, "a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heath land in the year of Clym's birth," suffers gruesome mutilation (3.6). Storms such as this one dramatize the imperceptible but nonetheless tenacious resistance of the heath to cultivation--much as stop-action photography hastens the gradual setting of the sun. A storm is the darkness of the heath in motion.

Even though Eustacia embodies that essential darkness, she remains "unreconciled" to the heath--and by extension to the elemental force of her own nature. Thus "suppressed" and likely to break out in "sudden fits of gloom," it wars with her humanity. To the natural man or woman--to Eustacia, who says, "The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me"--a storm will seem the capricious manifestation of divine impatience with the tedious war of attrition that the ferns and furze-tufts are waging against the plow. Eustacia, who falls mortal victim to an actual storm near the end of the novel, is all along the victim of her own eruptive moods. She thus personifies the tempestuous gloom of an apotheosized Egdon Heath.

Eustacia is herself the deity of her own primitive, natural religion. This goddess, and not the one whom the

angelic Clym conceives her to be, is the one Hardy has in mind when he asserts, "She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess." If Eustacia ruled the universe, he continues cynically,

There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alteration of caresses and blows that we endure now. (1.7)

The deity who presides over such imbalance as this belongs to a hierarchy in which the oldest and perhaps most inscrutable god governs nature and exercises his capriciousness by such dramatic means as windstorms, floods, earthquakes, and fires set by lightning. And the man who feels "barbarous satisfaction" in the heath's routing of civilization has to find bewitching a woman who personifies its most dramatic means of waging war.

The self-divided Clym is incapable of a creative act, such as the lighting of a fire. Eustacia perversely delegates the lighting of one to Johnny Nunsuch. And while this fire is burning elsewhere, she enters the novel-- significantly appearing as a "figure against the sky" on

the very spot where the heathfolk's bonfires shortly thereafter begin to blaze.

There is an important similarity between Hardy's description of Eustacia atop Rainbarrow and his earlier description of the white road that traverses the darkening heath. At first the human form contrasts sharply with the burial mound, a monumental reminder that it is death for the human consciousness to merge with unconscious nature: "The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow." This human form, which has a "history" (1.2), completes the natural scene: "Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline." The human figure, significantly compared with a lantern, reminds the observer that human hands piled up the mound of earth that is Rainbarrow--a mound which itself surmounts a hill and is hardly distinguishable from it. Rainbarrow, like the highway, looks much like a "product" of nature. So, too, at last does the human figure. The stillness of the scene so deadens the imagination of Hardy's hypothetical observer that the form ceases to seem human and becomes "so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure

that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon" (1.2).

The "confusion" that Eustacia does cause when she begins to descend the barrow contrasts with the order that the heathmen, who supplant her, create with their bonfire. "The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread," and for a while Eustacia seemed to be perhaps the Celt who set that fire. Her failure to fulfil this role and light a bonfire herself--and so bring to life Hardy's comparison of her with a "lantern" within a "dome"--this failure as much as the stillness of the scene makes her presence there seem "organic." When she moves, it is as if a tree, or something similarly organic, moved.

Still, it is not too late for her to reassert her humanity and restore order. For the heathmen who replace her on Rainbarrow appear organic too--not through immobility but by virtue of the furze faggots, which make everyone look like "a bush on legs." The heathfolk's disengagement from the furze, which they then light, parabolically dramatizes mankind's emergence from a natural state into a civilized one. Eustacia's movement, which destroys the observer's impression that her presence is "organic," leaves Rainbarrow dark and the observer in the dark; he, like the reader, wants to know her story.

It is a perverse one. Eustacia lights no bonfire there, but she does hire one lit elsewhere. This fire, like her mysterious departure from the barrow, causes confusion. Unlike the other bonfires, Eustacia's is fueled not by native material (furze) but rather by "cleft-wood"--which ought to fuel fires only in "the remotest visible positions" of the district (1.3). The other bonfires tell of their particular locale; Eustacia's bonfire lies about its origin. Furthermore, it offends against the tradition in which the other fires participate. Hers uses Guy Fawkes' Day as a pretext for summoning Wildeve--or failing that, for memorializing their assignation the year before. This bonfire speaks falsely not only about its physical location (which the heathmen debate before they can pinpoint it) but also about its place within the tradition to which the other bonfires belong as "the lineal descendants" of the same primitive rites (1.3).

As John Crowe Ransom maintains that "the primary cause [of regionalism] is the physical nature of the region" (Selected Essays 48-9). Thus the traditional bonfires, fueled by autochthonous vegetation, and other customs translate the obscure "meanings" of land itself into something intelligible. Eustacia's later eagerness to attend the "gipsying," a village festival, indicates her potential ability to transform into something creative the

strife within herself--a strife that corresponds to the "black chaos" of the place whose "tone" she has "imbibed." Meanwhile, with reference to the estrangement of this "rebellious woman" Hardy writes, "To dwell on a heath without studying its meanings was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue" (1.7). Consequently Eustacia's bonfire is not, as are the others, emblematic of the "Promethian rebelliousness" that makes a being human. For her rebelliousness continues to smolder inside her (1.7). Nor would her dream of a life elsewhere, if realized, provide a creative release of her desire. Life in Budmouth or "on the skirts . . . of the gay world" of Paris (4.1) could no more express the transformation of her elemental nature than the mansions in those cities could present a convincing facade for the "open hills," from whose "cold darkness" the "stifled warmth within her" seeks release (1.7).

Because Eustacia is the object of Clym's love whether it is the "chaste," unearthly love of the idealist or the "barbarous satisfaction" of the sensualist, marriage to her has the potential of integrating Clym's mind with his body. His mind, however, recoils. While Eustacia would try to fit the open hills of Egdon into the mansions of Budmouth, Clym would hold to his vision of the world as a place that

matches the heaven of his own mind--which must look like the mansions-within-a-house of Christ's description of Heaven (John 14.2).

It is reintegration, and not self-estrangement as Gregor contends, that Clym fears from marriage. The only love he has previously known is his "undemonstrable" love for his mother, and it has necessitated the repression of his eroticism, whose creative liberation will begin when he joins hands with Eustacia. The brutal weather witnessed by Clym on leaving his mother's house mirrors his fear of what it will mean to his kingdom of the mind (where he keeps inviolate his Platonic love for his mother) for him to set up house with Eustacia. For like that kingdom, which is distinct from the rest of his nature, the "fir and beech plantation" (which is "undergoing amputations, bruises, crippling, and harsh lacerations") is "enclosed" from the heath, which seems one with the storm, its "lover." The scene externalizes an abnormal fear of sex. Having surrendered to his sexual impulses, Clym has second thoughts; and Hardy hints that it is not in Clym's nature to love this way for long (3.6).

Despite Clym's fear, the days immediately following his marriage to Eustacia seem a return to prelapsarian integration, before Milton's Adam and Eve ate of the fruit and fancied that they felt "Divinity within them breeding

wings / Wherewith to scorn the Earth" (PL 9.1009-11). Hardy associates the first month of the marriage specifically with "Eden" (4.1)--an Eden which their marriage has created out of the fallen world. (There is even an apple tree, as Hardy later reveals, "of the sort called Ratheripe . . . just inside the gate, the only one which throve in the garden" [4.5].) Hardy has already noted that "any man could imagine himself to be Adam" in this place (2.1), but that reference at the beginning of Book Two ("The Arrival") introduces his description of the desultory work of the heathmen who blend with nature rather than exercise dominion over it, as God commissioned Adam to do. The reference to Adam belongs more appropriately at the beginning of Book Four than at the beginning of the book concerned with the arrival of Clym, whose "project" to save the heathmen's minds would leave their bodies at the mercy of the elements. For it is at the beginning of the fateful section, "The Closed Door," during "the one season of the year, and the one weather of the season, in which the heath was gorgeous" that Clym and Eustacia know that state which Blake calls "innocence"--that "life of expanded and released desire," as Frye describes it, "which is most commonly the world of children and lovers" (xxvii). Of this time Hardy writes,

The heath and changes of weather were quite blotted out from their eyes. . . . They were enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light. (4.1)

A projection of their love, this luminosity domesticates the "untameable" heath, whose dark "tone"--even in this most hospitable of seasons--survives in shades of "inharmonious colour." The same light--except that it was a projection of Hardy and Emma Gifford's youthful love--gave "colour and cast" to the rocky hillside at Castle Boterel, which witnessed their courtship. Donald Davie, in his article "Hardy's Virgilian Purples," aptly characterizes this light as "the spiritual light of sexual love" (140). Like a hearthfire, a symbol in Hardy's work of fertile domesticity, that luminosity gives nature a human look.

Soon, however, thought splits from feeling--the thought of a philosopher who discovers that his mind inhabits not, say, the imperishable golden bird of Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" but the "little ball of feather and bone" of Hardy's own "Shelley's Skylark" (101). The "thought" occurs to Clym "that the quality of finiteness was not foreign to Eden." It is as if Clym fears that

Eustacia will prove to be not the goddess of reason whom he originally envisioned as his soul-mate, but rather the capricious goddess whom Hardy describes, whose volatility reveals itself in changes of weather and worse. Clym fears that her love for him will prove "evanescent" (4.1).

Clym's reaction to this thought destroys whatever self-integration he has briefly known. In order to remove his relationship with Eustacia from the threat of "finitude," Clym (like the speaker of Hardy's poem "At a Seaside Town in 1869") determines to "seek the pure / Thought-world, and bask in her allure" (501). By retreating to his kingdom of the mind, Clym expects to free the affections from their dependence on flesh and circumstance. Tate's account of what happens when a person (and not an angel) "tries to disintegrate or to circumvent the image in the illusory pursuit of essence" also describes what is about to happen to Clym:

When human beings undertake this ambitious program, divine love becomes so rarefied that it loses its human paradigm, and is dissolved in the worship of intellectual power, the surrogate of divinity that worships itself. It professes to know nature as essence at the same time that it has become alienated from nature in the rejection of its material forms. (Essays 429)

Unhappily for Clym, "Earth's the right place for love," as Robert Frost insists in "Birches" (153). Regional poet that he was, Frost would have seen that Clym, by attempting to transfer his relationship with Eustacia from earth to an intellectual heaven risks the creative bond between himself and his wife.

The return of this "enthusiasm about ideas," as Eustacia later calls her husband (4.6), to his studies signals Clym's revival of his scheme to make her, as well as himself, a "unit" of sacrifice as soon as possible--to make her as inhuman as he is already. But as it is impossible to become creative through a change of residence (as Eustacia hopes to do by moving to Budmouth or Paris), so is it impossible to erect a civilization, as Clym hopes, by a disembodied flight into the "blue deep" of Shelley's skylark--a flight motivated by fear of earthly love. For the commonwealth requires work--such as Oak and Bathsheba perform (in Far from the Madding Crowd) to save their harvest from the storm. Their work, a form of homemaking, finds a counterpart in the less dramatic, mundane homemaking that Clym and Eustacia were beginning. It gave the environment a human look. Like covering ricks during a storm, setting up house finds meaning in its opposition to nature, which will overrun the garden and eventually pull down the house, should the housekeeping slacken. Thus

homemaking has no meaning in the kingdom of the mind where Clym hopes Eustacia's love for him will prove as lasting as the "undemonstrable" love between mother and son. In that abstract realm as in Heaven, there are no hearts and hands; nor is there marriage. For as Ransom muses in "The Equilibrists" (a poem, coincidentally, in which he, like Hardy in this novel [4.1], compares two lovers with a binary star),

In Heaven you have heard no marriage is,
 No white flesh tinder to your lecheries,
 Your male and female tissue sweetly shaped
 Sublimed away, and furious blood escaped. (86)

When Clym embarks on his "illusory pursuit of essence," the "tyrant head"--to use an epithet from another of Ransom's poems--obliges him to ignore "the estate of body," to disregard his physical well-being. But as Ransom cryptically maintains in his famous "Painted Head,"

The flesh contouring shallowly on a head
 Is a rock-garden needing body's love
 And best bodiness to colorify

The big blue birds sitting and sea-shell flats
 And caves, and on the iron acropolis
 To spread the hyacinthine hair and rear

The olive garden for the nightingales. (92)

In Clym's case his eyes (the "big blue birds" of the poem) darken--they figuratively lose their color in the absence of the "body's love," which the "tyrant head" has spurned. Irving Howe shrewdly surmises that "the decay of Clym's sight . . . suggests a diminished virility" (63). In fact, owing in part to his evasion of her body's love--his effort to move their relationship to the "iron acropolis" of Ransom's poem--Eustacia's eyes also darken: Clym denies nothing when she laments, "how madly we loved two months ago! . . . Who would have thought then that by this time my eyes would not seem so very bright to yours nor your lips so very sweet to mine?" There is literally no way for her eyes to appear "bright" to her purblind husband. Besides, even if he could see them now, they would appear "stormy" (4.2). For if his "diminished virility" has dampened his desire for his sensual bride, it has frustrated her. Clym's loss of sight causes a loss of affection. The psychological terrain of their marriage, an "olive garden," has hardened into a "rock-garden."

"[A] brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more," Clym becomes, when he takes up furze-cutting, a part of the scene he earlier viewed with "barbarous satisfaction"--an insect among insects,

which "seemed to enroll him in their band." They, and no longer his wife, are his "familiar"---the "Huge flies, . . . quite in a savage state, [which] buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man" (4.2). To characterize his "pleasure" from the "monotony of his occupation" as "barbarous satisfaction" is to overstate. But whatever the pleasure, it is hostile to human aspirations, for this "monotony" takes the place of the "delightful monotony" of his first month of marriage (4.1). In working uncreatively on the heath, Clym is doing nothing creative with his wife, who embodies the heath. Without his helping hand, Eustacia finds herself alone with the heath, which is fast losing the human look that their hands together gave it two months earlier.

There is now "an adamantine veil / Between his heart and mind" (as between the heart and mind of Prince Athanase)--a veil that does not lift until his encounter with his dying mother. If Clym enjoyed a month of self-integration while he and Eustacia set up house, he is experiencing, now that he is cutting furze, utter self-division: the intellectual dreams of a night-school, while the natural man finds pleasure in the displaced eroticism of mindless, physical labor.

"[I]f I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing," Eustacia tells her husband, who sings "to pass the time" (4.2). Clym's songs, which merely facilitate his life as an insect, inspire not even a "private minuet," such as the one inspired by Grandfer Cattle's ballad during the heathfolk's celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day. That old man's solitary dance quickly involved the whole tribe.

Regardless of what Eustacia says she would do, her own rebellion against the dark, within which Clym's neglect confines her, begins--admirably--not as a curse against that "cruel taskmaster" the heath but rather as a decision to attend the "gipsying," to participate with her social inferiors in a "village festivity." Her resolve signals a lessening of her class-obsession. More important, while Clym chooses the role of heathman-as-insect, his wife chooses the role of heathman-as-creator. The heathmen, who ordinarily blend in with the heath, give it a human look not by working daily in their desultory way but rather by playing.

Like the earlier celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day and the later Maypole dance, this village festivity returns the participants to the pagan dawn of civilization and involves them in mankind's first creative act--a dance that represents the transformation of raw, elemental force into

creative energy. It is as if in each individual psyche, the rational man (who responds to pattern and design) has joined hands to wrestle with the natural man (who reacts to physical stimulus); and this antagonism yields a dance. Hardy specifically associates the vitality of the festivity with "paganism," which he identifies as the spirit of a prelapsarian time, when each couple was an Adam and Eve, a microcosm of society. Of the dancers Hardy writes, "paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves." This experience (which anticipates Clym's "moment" on the heath with his dying mother) recalls his and Eustacia's honeymoon, when the couple was a self-contained world. Had they gone to the gipsying together, their affection for each other would likely have revived-- as does that of the other couples, whom Eustacia enviously observes: "The forty hearts of those waving couples were beating as they had not done since, twelve months before, they had come together in similar jollity" (5.8).

Festivals that excite the pagan spirit in modern man take him back to the childhood of the race. And they invite him to rediscover his original creative self. At this primitive stage of civilization, social order is so rudimentary that the dance of men and woman around a fire can easily lose its own crude form and thus become (as this

dance does for Eustacia and Wildeve) "an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds" (5.8). The modern-day couple then faces the challenge of creating out of the wreckage of established social and religious institutions (as did primitive man and woman out of a vacuum) a "commonwealth of hearts and hands."

Eustacia's dance with Wildeve, however, degenerates into orgy. Unlike herself, who came in search of the warmth missing amid the "arctic frigidity" of the sterile kingdom of her husband's mind, Wildeve has forsaken the fertile domesticity of an environment that includes a pregnant wife. Their "social sense" unraveling, they "reel" (as Tennyson would have put it) "back into the beast" ("The Passing of Arthur" 26)--driven "back" (in Hardy's words) "into old paths which were now doubly irregular" (5.8).

The much later Maypole dance (6.1) is an attenuated account of what a "pagan" festivity could have done for Clym and Eustacia. The paganism of this holiday, which involves Diggory Venn and Thomasin, connects it with both Guy Fawkes' Day and the "gipsying." Although Thomasin does not actually attend the dance (which takes place near Blooms-End), she is there in feeling. While she thinks it

improper for her to go alone to the "revel," she dresses colorfully--as she has not done since Wildeve's death. She observes attentively the movements of Venn, the reddleman-turned-dairy farmer, there by himself. Afterwards, she can say, "I have seen you dancing this evening, and you had the very best of the girls for your partners." And his sigh, which accompanies his negative answer when she asks if the maiden whose glove he has been looking for were one of his partners, indicates that they were all her surrogates. Metaphorically, Venn, with Thomasin's glove in his pocket, leaves the Maypole dance hand in hand with her.

Their marriage is the culmination of Venn's humanization, which begins with his transformation from reddleman into dairyman. Thomasin's original rejection of his suit exiled him from human society. He became a "Mephistophelian visitant," whose home was an amoral dreamscape, the site of "all the horrid dreams which had afflicted the juvenile spirit since imagination began." He belongs to the childhood of the race. As the supernatural occurrences of that time have lost their magic to the explanations of science, modernity--in the form of railways--has cost the reddlemen "the poetry of existence" (1.9).

In an important early article, "Hardy's 'Mephistophelian Visitants,'" J. O. Bailey correctly notes

that "Diggory as 'Mephistophelian visitant' is not to be taken as a literal imitation of Mephistopheles" but rather as one of Hardy's "impersonators of Heaven" (1150). Venn seems such a good angel that it is easy not to notice that his supernatural powers are as amoral as natural forces. Despite his red color, which distinguishes him from the heath (as the garb of the heathmen fails to distinguish them), Venn can effortlessly become "a bush on legs," as when he covers himself with "turves" in order to eavesdrop on Eustacia and Wildeve (1.9). Moreover, the reddleman's interference, like that of an amoral god, results in as much grief as happiness: his interference is responsible for Wildeve's visit to Eustacia in broad daylight--on the very day that Mrs. Yeobright, thanks also to the reddleman, decides to visit Clym. Wildeve's presence explains Eustacia's refusal to open the door to the older woman. By precipitating this pivotal scene, Venn indirectly provokes the tragedy that ultimately makes possible his marriage to Thomasin.

By the time this marriage occurs, the reddleman has, as Clym nicely puts it, "become a human being again" (6.1). If the metamorphosis of the reddleman into a human being represents for the region a break with its poetical past, Venn's transformation from reddleman to dairyman (his father's vocation) respects the continuity of rural life--

as Clym's "project" does not. Had Clym chosen to farm, as did his father, The Return of the Native would likely have been a pastoral novel, as it would also have been had the story of Thomasin and Venn been central.

Clym, inspired by his respect for his dead mother (who dreamed that he would marry Thomasin), does himself propose marriage to Thomasin. Troubled, as was his mother, by Venn's social standing, Clym later objects to her engagement to the dairyman. These reactions indicate how closely Clym allies himself with his mother after her death--and how sterile is that alliance. This sterility better accords with the mood of the novel than does the hopefulness of Thomasin's marriage to Venn, which Hardy himself found inconsistent, if for no other reason than that it belonged, as Gregor observes, "much more happily to the fictional world of Far from the Madding Crowd" (106).

Clym's resolve to heal the breach between himself and his mother coincides, significantly, with Eustacia's "excitement" after the gipsying (4.4). He fears excitement, whether his wife's or his own, since it suggests the dreaded evanescence of human affairs. Eustacia's arousal exaggerates the sensuality from which the angelic Clym has flown and threatens to arouse feelings that he has renounced. By healing the breach between

himself and his mother, Clym can hope to return to an earlier time in his life, when love was "undemonstrable"--when "the chasm in their lives which his love for Eustacia had caused was not remembered by Yeobright, and to him the present joined continuously with that friendly past that had been their experience before the division" (4.7).

This "moment," which comes when Clym finds his mother near death on the heath, releases his natural instincts from the tyranny of his enlightened mind. And his love for her ceases to be "undemonstrable": he displays his feelings--the sexual feelings that all sons feel first for the mother--by "pressing his lips to her face." The occasion seems to arouse an infantile sexuality in the young man, who consequently regresses to a state of childhood innocence not unlike the Blakean innocence of his and Eustacia's first month of marriage when they were oblivious to everything except each other: "all sense of time and place left him, and it seemed as if he and his mother were as when he was a child with her many years ago on this heath at hours similar to the present."

Although Clym awakens to "activity" as if from a dream, he retains a physical hold on his past, and--"like Aeneas with his father"--he carries his mother to shelter (4.7). In a celebrated poem, "Aeneas at Washington," Tate alludes to the same episode of The Aeneid. Dupree, in his

study of Tate's poetry, calls Anchises ("the old man") Aeneas's "symbol of the living past" (143). Mrs. Yeobright means much the same to Clym. In Virgil's epic, Aeneas panics during his anxious escape from Troy--panics when his father, whom he is carrying on his back, warns of imminent peril from the pursuing Greeks; Aeneas consequently forgets about his wife (who has been following him) until he and his father reach safety--then he finds her missing. Hardy's allusion to this incident is especially suggestive since Clym, who in his anxiety similarly forgets Eustacia, is carrying his mother. Perhaps the innocence to which Clym regresses resembles his innocence with Eustacia because his urgent need not only to save his mother but also to preserve the "symbol of [his] living past" throws the angelic mind (whose arrogance it is to believe that it can love divinely--without the aid of symbols) into contact with the human body, and the resulting vitality is a creative, displaced sexuality. The exhausted man makes a shed comfortable for his mother, then runs "with all his might" for help (4.7). Fundamentally, Clym is setting up house with her and involving the community in that creative endeavor.

In fact, when the community does assemble around the dying woman, ingredients are present that link this unhappy affair with other, festive occasions that enhance the

"commonwealth of hearts and hands." There is a fire--a kind of hearthfire--used to fry the dead adders, whose grease is to salve her snake-bite. Even music plays a part by virtue of Grandfer Cantle's rejection of it at this time: "if I were ever such a dab at the hautboy or tenor viol, I shouldn't have the heart to play tunes upon 'em now" (4.7). The old man seems to perceive a connection between this tribal gathering and others, like the one on November 5.

A spirit of paganism propels Clym further into the past than his own childhood. This modern, rational man returns to the childhood of the race, where he recurs to superstition. When one of the heathmen insists that to save Mrs. Yeobright "You must rub the place with the fat of other adders," Clym can only express skepticism and acquiesce. He "anoint[s] the wound" himself (4.7).

His sense of self-integration shatters when Johnny Nunsuch announces that Mrs. Yeobright (with whom the boy walked after her departure from Clym's house) "said I was to say that . . . she was a broken-hearted woman and cast off by her son" (4.8). The death of a parent ordinarily loosens one's hold on the past--as does a marriage; the revelation from Johnny Nunsuch, which coincides exactly with Mrs. Yeobright's death, does more: it implies that Clym only seemed to regain a hold on his past. He has

apparently had no such hold since his marriage to Eustacia estranged him from his mother. He can retreat neither to his past, which seems inaccessible now that she is dead, nor to his kingdom of the mind, whose desecration he has accomplished through the surrender of his rationality to primitive superstition, which the enlightened Clym returned to Egdon to eradicate. His marriage to the woman who more than ever seems his mother's "supplanter" underscores, no doubt, his dislocation, and he collapses into a mental and an emotional limbo.

As Clym later acknowledges, he would find his mother's death easier to bear had there not still been between them, when she died, that "chasm . . . which his love for Eustacia had caused." The "barbarous satisfaction," aroused in him by the Queen of Night, destroyed the domesticity of his and mother's marriage of minds. And yet the dream that Clym had right as Mrs. Yeobright was knocking on the cottage door disclosed his own subconscious awareness of the fundamentally erotic nature of even his love for her (which the subsequent episode on the heath further illuminated). In that dream Clym takes Eustacia to his mother's house, which they find locked. His mother, involuntarily locked indoors, keeps calling out for help. Reconciliation between the couple and his mother seems to

have been the objective of the visit--reconciliation, in other words, between Clym's demonstrable love for Eustacia and his "undemonstrable" love for his mother, which his erotic feelings for his wife have compromised. His mother's house, where Clym grew up, appears in the dream to represent the kingdom of the mind, an idealization of his past (where he keeps house later, after Eustacia's death, with only his mother's ghost). His effort to install Eustacia there indicates a subconscious wish to corrupt, so to speak, that sterile kingdom. Mrs. Yeobright's appeal for help, presumably in escaping, implies Clym's own awareness, consciously denied, of the natural, erotic basis of his love for his mother. If Clym's estrangement from Eustacia has represented an attempt to lock her out of his mind and to lock his mother in, then the dream expresses his subconscious wish to release his feelings from repression--to admit them. The dream proves prophetic: Mrs. Yeobright's visit to her son and daughter-in-law's house expresses in fact what her appeal for her freedom expresses in the dream--her willingness to accept Clym's feelings for Eustacia.

When Clym learns of his mother's unsuccessful attempt at reconciliation, he realizes that his love for Eustacia, though it created a "chasm" between himself and his mother, did not finally keep them apart. Instead, it was

Eustacia's excitability. Not only does her alleged assignation with Wildeve in Clym's own house expose her whorishness (which has given Clym himself the same "barbarous satisfaction" as he has derived from the profligacy of nature). But it also manifests, to Clym, her irremediable antagonism towards domesticity--not only towards their own home-life but also towards the domesticity that Mrs. Yeobright's visit promised to restore to his relationship with his mother. He almost seems to believe that Eustacia, through her refusal to admit the older woman into their cottage, was also responsible for the locked door in his dream: she locked him out of his mother's house. To enter, he must escape the Egdon dark where he now finds himself--he must escape the clutches of the Queen of Night. Clym seems to believe that even with his mother dead, he can keep house with her if only he can deny himself the "barbarous satisfaction" that Eustacia tempts him to feel: "Don't look at me with those eyes"--Eustacia's eyes are "stormy" (4.2)--"as if you would bewitch me again!" Clym demands during their confrontation after his interview with Johnny Nunsuch. "How bewitched I was!" he continues. "How could there be any good in a woman that everybody spoke ill of" (5.3).

Clym must try to distinguish in kind, as well as in degree, his feelings for Eustacia from his feelings for his

mother. Of Clym's first week in residence at his mother's house, Hardy writes, "He had spent the time in working about the premises, sweeping leaves from the garden paths, cutting dead stalks from the flower beds, and nailing up creepers which had been displaced by the autumn winds." As Hardy explains this activity, "it had become a religion with him to preserve in good condition all that had lapsed from his mother's hands to his own." Even so, this work (which makes a home out of nature, as Clym's furze-cutting failed to do) expresses creatively his feelings not only for his mother but also for his estranged wife: "During these operations he was constantly on the watch for Eustacia." Clym seems to be keeping house with her in her absence as well as with his mother in hers. If he is working to recover that moment of reintegration with his mother on the heath, he is also working, inadvertently, to recover his first month of marriage to Eustacia. Yet a far more intense eroticism underlies his "old solicitude" (which has revived) "for his mother's supplanter" than his homemaking here transforms into creative energy (5.6). Gardening at comparatively fertile Blooms-End is not the same as taming Egdon Heath, which Clym must do, in a way, to win Eustacia back.

When Clym goes in search of Eustacia into the storm that claims her life, he undertakes belatedly to tame the

heath. The dark that his Queen of Night personifies has rioted: "Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without" (5.7). Clym's task is to save her from herself no less than from the actual storm--thus the unanswerable question as to whether she dies by suicide. The chaos turns her inside-out, so that when Clym sets foot upon the heath, he steps into a nightmare that becomes his own, as well as Eustacia's--an archetypal nightmare of mankind. When, almost a year earlier, he first appeared to her at a Christmas dance, "the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcass shone out of him like a ray" (2.6). Now the night, the mythical dragon in the west, has devoured that god, the sun: "twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi . . . lay scattered about the heath like the rotten liver and lungs of some colossal beast" (5.7). Within the belly of this beast (within, as it were, Eustacia's womb, the source of her mutinous eroticism), Clym tries to keep step with her, so as to bring her into step with him--in a dance, at last, a dance of life.

Tess and the D'Urbervilles:

"The Dance They Had Led Her"

The "friendliness," writes Hardy, of the Marlott field-folk with whom Tess, now an unwed mother, works at harvest-time, "won her still farther away from herself, their lively spirits were contagious, and she became almost gay" (14--numbers throughout refer to chapters). Even so, it occurs to Tess, after the subsequent death of her baby, that "she might be happy in some nook which had no memories." She concludes, "To escape the past and all that appertained thereto was to annihilate it, and to do that she would have to get away" (15). This mistaken attitude reflects Tess's commitment to the modern state of mind that Allen Tate, championing regional culture, disparages as the "new provincialism": "that state of mind in which regional men lose their origins in the past and its continuity into the present, and begin every day as if there had been no yesterday" (Essays of Four Decades 542).

But events prove Tess wrong--and demonstrate, moreover, that it is really impossible to begin every day as if there had been no yesterday. On her way back to Flintcomb-Ash from the village where Angel's parents reside, Tess is entering another one when she pauses in the doorway of a barn. As a look of recognition passes between

herself and the "ranter" (Alec d'Urberville) preaching inside, there comes over her "an almost physical sense of an implacable past which still engirdled her." This encounter with the former lover, the revelation of whose existence estranged her husband from her--this encounter makes her see that "the break of continuity between her earlier and present existence, which she had hoped for, had not, after all, taken place. Bygones would never be complete bygones till she was a bygone herself" (45). This--the tenacious, and even ferocious survival of the past within the present--is the deceptively simple theme of Tess.

To Tess the past means mainly her "error" with Alec. In fact her past extends much further than this event--further even than her legendary d'Urberville past (which plays itself out in her relationship with Alec). After all, "the decay of old families and the theft of their titles by parvenus" inspires, as Robert Gittings observes, the novel's pervasive "atmosphere of inevitable and almost Darwinian replacement" (Thomas Hardy's Later Years 61). Were Tess not so forward-looking, her past would weigh far less heavily upon her. It is her self-conscious modernity that makes her predicament typify that of progressive, modern society. Through his portrait of Tess, Hardy asks how society can deal with its implacable past. He answers

this question through his treatment of yet another of Tess's inescapable pasts--the mythic, or magical past (which Frazer examines in The Golden Bough). In Tess this past takes the form of a dance. Hardy's question thus focuses on the relationship between Tess's ancestral past, which implies a bleak, Darwinian view of nature, and mankind's magical past. Surviving as it does in the form of rites and ceremonies no longer magical, this past remains relevant in an increasingly scientific, humanistic age as a representation of man's attempt to influence his insentient surroundings.

I

The climactic reappearance in Tess's life of Alec in the flesh follows the reappearance of various ghosts of her Trantridge past, scene of her youthful "error." These ghosts haunt her after her "rally" and during her time of penitent labor at Flintcomb-Ash. Alec himself makes a ghostly appearance at Talbothays through Angel's account to Tess of his earnest clergyman father's expostulation with "a lax young cynic," whom Tess easily identifies as Alec (27). A week before their marriage, when Tess and Angel journey on Christmas Eve to the town nearest the dairy, Tess spies a man whom "she fancied [to be] a Trantridge

man." He recognizes her, speaks insultingly of her to a companion, and literally takes on the chin the indignation of Angel who has overheard him (33). When this same man joins Tess on the road to Flintcomb-Ash (41), she bolts into a fir "plantation" where, in a memorable scene, she spends a "fitful" night while wounded pheasants (bred for sport), which have also taken refuge here, fall dead around her. Her flight now (no less than her move from Marlott to Talbothays) proves to have been unsuccessful when the Trantridge man turns out to be Farmer Groby of Flintcomb-Ash, whose hired hands include the "Amazonian sisters," Dark Car the Queen of Spades (whom Tess supplanted as Alec's minion) and the Queen of Diamonds--"those who had tried to fight with her," as Hardy reminds the reader, "in the midnight quarrel at Trantridge" (43). Although they fail to recognize Tess, it is here at Flintcomb-Ash that she must pay, as the title of the section implies, no less for her error than for her attempt to evade its consequences: "Well," Farmer Groby asserts, "you thought you had got the better of me the first time at the inn with your fancy-man, and the second time on the road, when you bolted; but now I think I've got the better of you." And "Tess, between the Amazons and the farmer, like a bird in a clap-net"--or a young woman engirdled by an implacable past--"returned no answer" (43). It is as if Tess (no less

than the pheasants) has been bred for sport--for the sport of these "ghosts." It is only natural that the sportsman Alec (whom Tess blames "for the trap he set for me in my simple youth" [57]), should now reenter her life.

Tess senses herself that the ghosts whose sport she seems are far more venerable than these from her Trantridge past. Even as she moves to escape her "sham" d'Urberville past at Trantridge, she gravitates towards the scene of her authentic if legendary d'Urberville past: "one of the interests of the new place [Talbothays] to her was the accidental virtue of its lying near her forefathers' country" (15). All the same "she almost hated them [her ancestors] for the dance they had led her" (16).

Tess wishes to step out of this dance no less than to escape the "trap" of her "bogus" kinsman, the "clap-net" of the Trantridge "ghosts." When Angel proposes the study of history, Tess demurs: "what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only--finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall act her part" (19).

In the late poem "Family Portraits" (whose setting calls to mind the stairwell, graced by paintings of ancient d'Urbervilles, in Tess and Angel's honeymoon residence), Hardy answers Tess's question. In "Family Portraits"

(919), which alludes to the poet's scandalous ancestral past, "Three picture-drawn people stepped out of their frames," two women and one man, who act out a dumbshow, "some drama, obscure, . . . With puppet-like movements of mute strange allure." This drama represents, as the poet soon perceives, "their own lifetime's tragic amour, / Whose course begot me." Apparently the trio's "law-lacking passions of life" provoked a tragic rivalry whose full story has failed to survive, and the poet conceives the purpose of the dumbshow to be "to teach / Me in full, at this last." Yet Hardy, who feels for these three souls (agonized by their own reenactment of the tragedy), also fears the "hurt" that the full story may cost himself, and he cuts the players off. As they return "to their frames and numb state," his conviction grows that this momentary loss of "courage" has spoiled his chance of averting much "future pain"--it is his fate now to reenact the "dark doings" of his ancestral past. "Thus are your own ways to shape, know too late!" they vainly warn, leaving the poet to confess,

I have grieved ever since: to have balked future
 pain,
 My blood's tendance foreknown,
 Had been triumph. Nights long stretched awake
 have I lain

Perplexed in endeavors to balk future pain
 By uncovering the drift of the drama. In vain,
 Though therein lay my own.

"[T]o have balked future pain"--a fantasy, of course . . . Nevertheless, fate does seem to mean for Hardy a mysterious, inherited tendency of the blood, which often overflows the conscious will. In an earlier poem, "The Pedigree" (460), Hardy relates how late one night he was studying his family tree when "The branches seemed to twist into a seared and cynic face / Which winked and tokened towards the window like a Mage." The window becomes for Hardy a magical mirror in which "a long perspective I could trace / Of my begetters, dwindling backward each past each / All with the kindred look." The physical resemblance, which he perceives, between himself and his furthest ancestors (just as Angel discerns a similarity between Tess's "lineaments" and those of her pictured forebears) yields a startling vision:

That every heave and coil and move I made
 Within my brain, and in my mood and speech,
 Was in the glass portrayed
 As long forestalled by their so making it . . .

He concludes cynically that he has deluded himself with thoughts of free will:

'I am merest mimicker and counterfeit!--

Though thinking, I am I,

And what I do I do myself alone.'

How illusory, then, is the analogy that Hardy applies to Tess after her arrival at Talbothays: "The sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous stratum on the spot of its sowing had been transplanted to a deeper soil" (20). No sapling at all, it is a family tree, whose twisted "face" belongs no less to Tess than to those d'Urberville women, whose grotesque "features" give back her own. In effect, Tess turns away from the "mirror" when she asserts, "The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'" (19).

Of course, Tess does play a representative role--"the maid who went to the merry green wood," often against her will, "and came back in a changed state" figures in ballads (14). Still, the "book" whose story Tess acts out is a geneological study of the knightly d'Urbervilles, one of whom, "A certain d'Urberville of the sixteenth or seventeenth century committed a dreadful crime in his family coach; and since that time members of the family see or hear the old coach whenever--" and here Angel breaks off (33). (He has been explaining to Tess her sense of deja-vu

as regards an antique carriage hired for their wedding.) Later, as the Durbeyfields are facing eviction from the lifehold at Marlott, and Tess "fancie[s]" that she hears "a carriage and horses" (when it is in fact only the arrival of a self-styled "sham" d'Urberville on horseback), this former lover, Alec, informs her that "it is held to be of ill omen to the [d'Urberville] who hears it"--or sees it. The "dreadful crime" was murder, "a murder committed by one of the family centuries ago." Alec proceeds with a more elaborate account of the legend than Angel supplied: "One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her--or she killed him--I forgot which" (51).

Alec's confusion (which raises the possibility that the abducted woman was herself a d'Urberville¹) is much to

¹Incest is a buried theme in Tess's own relationship with Alec, a "sham" d'Urberville. Hardy knows that urban readers may well believe that the Durbeyfields, by encouraging a match between their daughter and a man whom they regard as kin, are sanctioning incest. Rather than simply remind his audience that Alec is not a blood relation, Hardy explains that unions between kinspeople with much closer ties than the conjectured one between Tess and Alec were hardly uncommon in rural Wessex. This strategy calls attention to the "incest," a taboo that seems to interest Alec who, while concealing from Tess the truth about the Stokes, persists in calling her "Coz." The Durbeyfields hope that Tess's union with a still vital branch of the family will reinvigorate their own, but it is possible that the family's decay resulted from inbreeding.

Hardy's purpose, since Tess, who plays the role of the abducted woman and happens herself to be a d'Urberville, goes on to murder her "d'Urberville" abductor--thus she fulfils herself as a "genuine" d'Urberville even as she avenges the death of the beautiful woman originally abducted.

Her dual role as d'Urberville and abducted woman raises some interesting questions. For example, in what sense if any is Tess and Angel's marriage an abduction? They are leaving on their honeymoon in a hired carriage, which dates from "the old days of post-chaise travelling," when a sense of oppression deadens her countenance and she answers Angel's anxious query, "I seem to have seen this carriage before, to be very well acquainted with it. It is very odd--I must have seen it in a dream" (33). In her relationship with Angel, to whom she later speaks of Alec's "wrong to you through me" (57), Tess is Alec's agent. Here, as the newlywed couple is leaving the church, Tess is acting the d'Urberville role, abducting Angel much as Alec "abducted" her--much as her armed progenitor did a beautiful woman.

Angel wonders, after the murder of Alec, "what obscure strain in the d'Urberville blood had led to this aberration--if it were an aberration" and speculates "that the family tradition of the coach and murder might have

arisen because the d'Urbervilles had been known to do these things" (57). Hardy himself supported Angel's supposition by insisting, "The murder Tess commits is the hereditary quality, to which I more than once allude, working itself out in this impoverished descendant of a once noble family" (Waldoff 142).

Still, it is through traits that Tess has inherited from her "unknightly" mother as well as from "Sir John" that the legend works itself out genetically in the present. Thus Tess seems no less the descendant of the abducted woman (more likely a peasant than a d'Urberville) than the descendant of her abductor, the d'Urberville rake of Jacobean times. Indeed, Hardy seems as deliberately vague about the source of both Tess's physical characteristics and her emotional nature as Alec is unclear about the facts of the legend. On the one hand, "the personal charms which Tess could boast of were in the main part her mother's gift, and therefore unknightly, unhistorical" (3); Tess "had inherited . . . from her mother," Hardy insists, "a luxuriance of aspect, a fullness of growth, which made her appear more of a woman than she really was" (5). On the other hand, "her fine features [are] unquestionably traceable" in the "lineaments" of the "horrid" d'Urberville women whose portraits grace the stairwell at the farmhouse (once the d'Urberville manor

house) where the Clares plan to spend their honeymoon--"The long, pointed features, narrow eye, and smirk of the one, so suggestive of merciless treachery; the bill-hook nose, large teeth, and bold eye of the other, suggesting arrogance to the point of ferocity" (34).

Despite her own "impulsive nature" (12), which reveals itself in "those sudden impulses of reprisal to which she was liable" (11)--such as her stabbing of Alec--Tess hardly seems treacherous or ferocious. In fact, as her mother accurately observes, "she's tractable at bottom" (4), and this characterization, Tess's tractability, may be traceable to "the slight incautiousness of character inherited from her race" (14), "that reckless acquiescence in chance too apparent in the whole d'Urberville family" (37). John Holloway astutely identifies Tess's "weakness" as a "dreamy unreality [that] results from her heredity" and reflects the "degeneration of an old stock," which is "among country folk . . . common enough" (271). Nevertheless, her "latent spirit" (12), if it exemplifies the Jungian principle of regression and progression, wells equally from her impetuous d'Urberville blood and from "the energy of her mother's unexpended family" (16).²

²The history of the d'Urberville family, from its extroverted Jacobean to its introverted Victorians, seems somewhat to anticipate Jungian psychology, whose alternation between extroversion and introversion becomes a pattern in Tess when the heroine strikes Alec at Flintcomb-

II

Tess's reenactment of her family legend belongs to a vast historical and, equally important, to an ahistorical drama--and not merely, as Leon Waldoff supposes, to the pages of gothic romance. (Waldoff, in a provocative article, "Psychological Determinism in Tess of the D'Urbervilles," dismisses Hardy's treatment of the legend as "little more than a Gothic and Romantic borrowing" [142].) Historical implications that transcend the predicament of the Durbeyfields themselves are implicit in Hardy's dry comment on their eviction from Marlott, where the family's lifehold has lapsed with the death of Tess's father:

Thus the Durbeyfields, once d'Urbervilles, saw descending upon them the destiny which, no doubt, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landless

Ash and Hardy observes, "Fancy might have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised" (351). Alec's murder, the "recrudescence" of the legendary d'Urberville crime, proves to be, of course, an extension of this "trick." As Tess later confesses to Angel, "I feared long ago, when I struck him on the mouth with my glove, that I might do it some day . . ." (406). Needless to say, Jung's notion applies to the individual psyche. Tess, however, embodies generations of d'Urberville psyches.

ones as they themselves were now. So do flux and reflux--the rhythm of change--alternate and persist in everything under the sky. (50)

Even the ravishment of the heroine belongs to this impersonal rhythm of change: "Doubtless," Hardy insists at the time, "some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant-girls of their time" (11).

These incidents manifest an "acquiescence in chance" on the part of the victims that seems no less characteristic of country folk throughout the ages, whose fatalism owes much to their life in nature, than of the Durbeyfields in particular. In fact Hardy writes of "the fatalistic convictions common to field-folk and those who associate more extensively with natural phenomena than with their fellow creatures" (32)--convictions that challenge Tess's "bright intelligence."

This fatalism distinguishes the "natural man" from the "scientific humanist." The natural man "stares helplessly at nature, minimizing his own intelligence and fascinated by its mysterious remoteness and stupid power" (Frye xxiv). The scientific humanist, as Donald Davie labels Hardy, believes that man's future well-being depends (in Hardy's words) on "loving-kindness operating through scientific

knowledge" and not on trust in nature. The insentient world that engirdles Tess knows nothing of human designs. As Hardy observes, "Nature does not often say 'See!' to her poor creature at a time when seeing can lead to happy doing, or reply 'Here!' to a body's cry of 'Where?' till the hide-and-seek has become an irksome, outworn game" (5).

More than historical, then, the rhythm of "flux and reflux" seems ahistorical. Certainly Hardy's observation relates to the evolution of species as much as to human civilization. For Roy Morrell that phrase characterizes nature, as viewed by Hardy the "evolutionist": "once one gets to know it, there seems nothing static in the 'design' of nature; one finds instead . . . flux and reflux: a restless movement in which innumerable factors are losing and gaining small advantages and the equilibrium is being continually adjusted" (95).

Just how unsteady is the equilibrium--how irregular the rhythm of change--in Hardy's universe? A darkly comic cosmic orgy, the Saturday-night revel in Chaseborough and its aftermath (which includes the heroine's ravishment) compose a burlesque whose thesis is that the physical laws of nature leave so much room for accident that riotous emotion more than reason seems analogous to the force that moves the sun and the other stars. Thanks to the silence of their "footfalls" and their enclosure within a golden

cloud of "vegeto-human pollen," the dancers do come to resemble heavenly bodies. Once each has made, through a random exchange of partners, "a satisfactory choice" of partner, "the ecstasy and the dream began, in which emotion was the matter of the universe, and matter but an adventitious intrusion likely to hinder you from spinning where you wanted to spin" (10). In this passage, which renders as a feeling the optical illusion that at high speed things lose solidity, the dance becomes a cosmic riot of emotion.

Surely it is matter and thought that weigh against each other, while matter, especially carnal matter, and emotion are intrinsic. In fact, the adventitiousness of their connection does prove, after all, illusory when the ecstasy of the dancers, which is beginning to seem spiritual, reveals its fundamental carnality. The scene becomes a burlesque of a cosmic collision--the collapse no less of the expanding universe (which Hardy presciently envisions)--when "Suddenly there was a dull thump on the ground: a couple had fallen and lay in a mixed heap," and couple after couple "came toppling over the obstacle" until they all became "a twitching entanglement of arms and legs" (10).

The burlesque has a second run as the dancers are returning to Trantridge. Drunk,

They followed the road with a sensation that they were soaring along in a supporting medium . . . , themselves and surrounding nature forming an organism of which all the parts harmoniously and joyously interpenetrated each other. They were as sublime as the moon and stars above them, and the moon and the stars were as ardent as they.

(10)

Thanks to their runaway emotions, fueled by alcohol, the couples experience an authentic oneness with nature, whose "drunkenness" complements their own. However, the apparently harmonious and joyous interpenetration of physical matter again proves illusory. The collision of the dancers in Chaseborough repeats itself when, at a "wild moment," Tess "could not help joining in with the rest" and laughing at Car, who takes offense at the laughter of her supplanter in Alec's eyes, and (with the other work-folk menacingly encircling them) the two women almost come to blows.

By the end of the chapter there is again an illusory harmony among heavenly bodies as "a circle of opalized light, formed by the moon's rays upon the glistening sheet of dew . . . never deserted the head-shadow [of each of these children of the open air], whatever its vulgar unsteadiness might be" (10). Meanwhile, a third colli-

sion--between Tess and Alec--is imminent.

The impulsiveness on the one hand and, on the other, the "acquiescence in chance" (which often reveals itself as dreaminess) that places Tess at the mercy of that flux and reflux--that rhythm of change--belongs to the natural man, "the man of prehistoric ages," as Freud puts it, who "survives unchanged in our unconscious" ("Thoughts for the Times on War and Death" 231). These characteristics lead Tess into her affair with Alec. During her first visit to The Slopes, in a scene that foreshadows her later seduction, Tess "obey[s] like one in a dream," while Alec lavishes her with strawberries and roses (5). This "dream" anticipates her later "reverie upon the leaves" of The Chase--although she is "inexpressibly weary" (11). Hardy implies, moreover, that just as "she abandoned herself to her impulse," accepting Alec's "invitation" to "Jump up behind me . . . and we'll get shot of the screaming cats in a jiffy" (10), so does impulsiveness, as well as tractability, characterize much of her subsequent relationship with him at Trantridge. No doubt "A little more than persuading had to do wi' the coming o't," as one of Tess's fellow harvesters at Marlott says of her illegitimate baby. Be that as it may, Tess was, as Hardy explains, "temporarily blinded by [Alec's] ardent manners"; she had "been stirred to confused surrender awhile" (12).

Afterwards, Hardy takes pains to insist that Tess's relationship with Alec, and not respectable society's condemnation of it, was "natural." Tess's mother, who never underestimates the influence of the sexual drive on human affairs, affirms (when her pregnant daughter returns to Marlott), "'Tis nater" (12). Indeed, she had so dressed Tess for her journey to Trantridge as to encourage nature to take its course. Later Hardy insists that the personifications of conventional morality with which the self-condemning Tess has peopled nature "were out of harmony with the actual world, not she" (13). And he describes her illegitimate child as the "bastard gift of shameless Nature, who respects not the social law" (14).

In fact, the same impulsiveness and "acquiescence in chance" that unites her with Alec ally themselves with nature after her rally to unite her with Angel. At Talbothays she finds herself "drifting into acquiescence" with the persistent Angel: "Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with nature in revolt against her scrupulousness" (28). Her surrender to Angel, to whose "embrace" she yields "with unreflecting inevitableness" (24), recapitulates her surrender to Alec. In her letter to Angel from Flintcomb-Ash, Tess maintains that she became, through her love for him, "another woman" from "the

one you disliked but never saw." If so, then her conviction that "The punishment you have measured out to me is deserved"--a conviction that displays the same self-condemnation as she felt after her surrender to Alec--reveals her subconscious understanding that the punishment she deserves applies to her surrender not to Alec but rather to Angel himself.

"Where was her guardian angel?" asks Hardy on the earlier occasion (11). If he is punning on "angel," he is cryptically reiterating his observation, at the end of her first visit to Trantridge:

Had she perceived this meeting's import, she might have asked why she was doomed to be seen and coveted that day by the wrong man and not by . . . the right and desired one in all respects . . . yet to . . . [Angel] who amongst her acquaintance might have approximated to this kind, she was but a transient impression, half forgotten. (5)

It seems her guardian angel deserted her when Angel himself, without having chosen Tess as his partner, stepped out of the dance on the Marlott green. When, at Talbothays, Angel's own "heart . . . outrun[is] his judgement" and he is himself "too quick and unreflecting"

(24), when he has finally "yielded to an impulse of which his head would disapprove" (27)--surrendered, in short, to "the mastery of circumstance" (25)--it is as if that same guardian angel has taken flight again.

Although Tess is almost seventeen when she goes to claim kin at The Slopes, she later attributes to her youthfulness her ignorance of nature's "hid riot," which overthrows her reason: "I was a child when I left this house four months ago," she desperately explains to her mother. "Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me?" If she owes to youth her ignorance of this danger, then her ignorance of man's bestial past is attributable to her lack of a personal past. Her mother, who has surely not read Darwin, is doubtless ignorant of human prehistory, yet experience has disclosed to her the riotous side of man's natural life, the life (as Darwin dramatically revealed) that human beings share with animals that live by instinct rather than intelligence.

There is yet another reason than Tess's youth for her ignorance of her mother's world of experience--as Tess herself, in the same breath, implies: "Ladies know what to fend hands against because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in

that way, and you did not help me" (12)! At the time of the accidental death of the Durbeyfields' horse, which brings to an end Tess's schooling, she is poised to enter an upwardly mobile world where a country girl can become a "lady" through education--a world where book-learning has replaced experience. Mentally younger than Tess, Mrs. Durbeyfield, sees marriage as her daughter's one hope of advancement: "The light-minded woman had been discovering good matches for her daughter almost from the year of her birth" (6). Tess, in contrast, has pinned her hopes for advancement on her education and possible professional training. Like other of Hardy's forward-looking characters--Fancy Day, Clym Yeobright, Elizabeth-Jane Henchard, Sue Bridehead--Tess aspires to be a teacher. Not even after the loss of her family's horse has dashed those aspirations, can she "regard Mrs. Durbeyfield's matrimonial hopes for her in a serious aspect" (6). It is for the "light-minded" to pin hopes for advancement on matrimony--and not for those, like Tess, of "bright intelligence."

In short, Tess's sexual innocence is part and parcel of Hardy's depiction of her as a character who has loosened her hold on her past--her regional, rural past--in order to gain a handhold on the future. And the distance between

that past, to which her mother belongs, and the future to which Tess aspires, is measured by education:

Between the mother, with her fast-perishing lumber of superstitions, folk-lore, dialect, and orally transmitted ballads, and the daughter, with her trained National teachings and Standard knowledge under an infinitely Revised Code, there was a gap of two hundred years as ordinarily understood. When they were together, the Jacobean and the Victorian ages were juxtaposed.

(3)

In effect Tess's education has made the two hundred years between Jacobean and Victorian times seem like the distance between prehistory and modernity. Equally ignorant of her d'Urberville forebears (who hail from the sixteenth or seventeenth century) and of her father--everyone's father--Lust, Tess has come to feel, thanks to her intellectual growth, "quite a Malthusian towards her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers when it was such a trouble to nurse and provide for them. Her mother's intelligence was that of a happy child: Joan Durbeyfield," Hardy concludes, "was simply an additional one . . . to her own long family of waiters on Providence" (5). Tess's Malthusianism, which

anticipates Sue Bridehead's in Jude, links her with an age that is beginning to look to science for solutions to social problems associated with the profligacy of the working class.

Love at first sight it may be for Tess when Angel dances with her fellows on the Marlott village green--but it is not because of his sexual appeal. Rather, it is because of his refined speech. After his precipitous departure, Tess can summon no enthusiasm for the herd of prospective partners--"they did not speak so nicely as the strange young man had done" (3).

That two-hundred-year gap of formal learning, which separates the Durbeyfields from the d'Urbervilles, is also the distance between Tess's affair with Alec (a return to her family's scandalous past) and the possible relationship between herself and Angel, forestalled by his departure from Marlott. Dorothy Van Ghent sensibly maintains that "Both Angel and Alec," projections of a self-divided heroine who embodies cultural transition, "are metaphors of extremes of human behavior, when the human has been cut off from community and has been individualized by intellectual education or by material wealth and traditionless independence" (209). Yet the rake hardly belongs exclusively to the Victorian period. Hardy, who leaned

leftward politically, is no doubt implying through his portrait of Alec, a merchant's heir, that modern, laissez-faire commercialism has produced a breed no less impelled by primitive, instinctual drives than barbarous Jacobean aristocrats.

Tess realizes only late in the novel, after Angel's desertion and Alec's reappearance, that she cannot escape this "primitive" past. Because she has been such a forward-looking woman, this realization proves devastating--but hardly less so to her than the story of her past involvement with Alec has been to Angel. The facts offend Angel's "fastidiousness," which he owes to his refinement--the refinement sought by the forward-looking Tess through education. Even though her education stopped before she could attain his degree of refinement--and before she could become as fastidious as Angel--still her conviction that he is right to find her "primitive" past offensive suggests that Angel embodies lessons, morals, that Tess was absorbing. (Anthony Winner characterizes Angel as "the distorted projection of her innate morality" [35]. But Hardy himself insists that "Most of the misery" felt by Tess on account of her past experience "had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations" [14]. Her moral values seem rather to have derived from her inkling of what was proper in

sophisticated society.) Angel thus exaggerates that side of Tess to which modernity has appealed.

Angel's condemnation of Tess externalizes her condemnation of herself. His reaction to her past reflects his enslavement "to custom and conventionality" (39), just as Tess's own attitude towards herself reflects her awareness of conventions that her native, hardly fastidious society does not share. Tess herself traces Angel's moral fastidiousness to urban society (41), whose middle-class values she has begun to absorb in school, under the new educational system. Her conscience, her super-ego, whose development Freud attributes (in Civilization and Its Discontents) to "fear of loss of love" (79-80), reflects the values not of her native rural society but rather of a refined urban culture. Tess cannot fear losing the love of her parents--her mother at least accepts her affair with Alec as a thing of nature--or the affection of rural society at large. The townspeople of Marlott fail to condemn her--she is oversensitive to the whispering at church. In fact, "the thought of the world's concern at her situation . . . was founded on illusion" (14). She finds the sympathy and gaiety of her fellow harvesters restorative. Rather, Tess fears the rejection of that society which she has aspired to enter, a society

personified by the young man of refined speech who should have danced with her on the village green.

Even so, Angel's moral rigidity and Alec's laxity are really two sides of the same coin, which images on one side (as from a distance) nature's regularity, and on the other (in close-up) its riotousness. "Convention," though Hardy sets it against nature, is hardly less "natural" than riotous sexuality. Blake seems to have grasped this concept without the aid of Darwin. This so-called pre-Romantic poet traces morality, according to Northrop Frye, to the attempt by intellectual man, all head and no heart, "to understand nature by patterns and diagrams" and "to fit human life to nature by imitating nature's regularity, or law" (xxvi). Hardy blurs this point in his eagerness to reveal the error of a society that justifies the stringencies of its moral code by claiming natural law as its model. By disclosing the corruption of conventional society, Hardy impugns the romantic, Wordsworthian concept of beneficent nature. Angel's enslavement to custom and conventionality, which (more than Alec's immoral advances) make sport of Tess, reflects his enthrallment to that romantic vision.

For Angel, a religious skeptic, nature takes the place of a divine lawgiver. Thus nature appears beneficent, like

the Christian deity, a lawgiver and a God of love, in whom Angel once believed. Hardy explains that Angel, now an Arnoldian secular humanist, found that life outdoors freed him "from the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" (18). It may seem inconsistent that Angel's moral system, since it finds its justification in natural law (as embodied by pastoral nature), should so lack charity, foremost among Christian virtues. The simplest explanation is that Angel's appreciation of bodily corruption is deficient. Just as Browning christianizes the atheistical idealist Shelley by forcing Shelleyan characters to "stoop"--as God did by becoming corruptible, mortal flesh--before they can soar, so does Hardy bring the Shelleyan Angel down to earth in the jungles of Brazil, where "crowds of agricultural labourers who had come out to the country . . . dazzled by representations of easy independence, had suffered, died, and wasted away" (49). As much as anything else, his own illness teaches him charity.

Till then, Angel appreciates nature more as an artifact than as something organic. He insists on seeing nature in relation to pastoral art--as if Talbothays were pictured on a Grecian urn. Hardy refers to "the aesthetic, sensuous, pagan pleasure in natural life and lush womanhood

which . . . Angel had lately been experiencing in Var Vale" (25), but surely his experiences here are rather more aesthetic than sensuous. (Similarly his "pleasure" is only theoretically pagan, since Angel holds all the while--as does "pagan" Sue Bridehead in Jude, Hardy's most ethereal character--to conventional morality.) He speaks to Tess of "pastoral life in ancient Greece" (19), and he persists in seeing the dairymen and -maids as "nymphs and swains" (25). But his refinement hides from him those "satyrs clasping nymphs--a multiplicity of Pans whirling a multiplicity of Syrinxes; Lotis attempting to elude Priapus, and always failing" (10). Tess, having witnessed this scene in Chaseborough (her ravishment later that night is an extension of it), has stumbled among the weeds in the mythological pasture. Thus she cannot understand the names that Angel calls her--"Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names." She tells him, "Call me Tess" (20). Still, Angel's idealization of her as "a visionary essence of woman--a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (20) eventually grows infectious. On the way to her wedding, she begins to see herself as a deity: "She was a sort of celestial person, who owed her being to poetry" (33). No sooner has she fancied herself thus than oppression weighs on her--she has seemed to recognize the coach. Tess owes her being to the d'Urbervilles.

Angel's romanticization of nature leads to his romanticization of Tess, whom he regards as "a fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (18), a "daughter of the soil" (19), not knowing, of course, that the "whorage" amongst whom Tess found herself at Trantridge were similarly "children of the open air." (The pastoral setting at Talbothays, where Tess and the other milkmaids seem to meld with nature, encourages the idealization of woman. But elsewhere--for example, near Flintcomb-Ash--how unromantic and without charm is a "field-woman" who "is part of the landscape" [42]!) To Angel nature appears neither orgiastic nor barren--he has visited neither The Chase nor Flintcomb-Ash. Thus it is inconceivable to him that Tess's past experiences fail to accord with his pastoral view of nature: "My Tess has, no doubt, almost as many experiences as that wild convolvulus out there on the garden hedge that opened itself this morning for the first time" (28).

By making Tess a personification of romantic, pastoral nature, Angel consigns her to the realm of artifice--he denies that she belongs in the world of experience. Angel can believe that she has no past partly because of his own apparent success at extinguishing the coal of his own past--at suppressing, in other words, those desires that rioted in London when "he was carried off his head and nearly entrapped by a woman much older than himself," a

woman of experience (18). "Provincial" (to use Tate's term) or "parochial" (to use Hardy's own) characterizes Angel's attitude towards the past.

Angel's parochialism explains his reaction to the news that Tess belongs to an "extinct" family, the likes of which he has previously disparaged (19). Angel now romanticizes her ancestral past as if it were a costume ball. Just as he named her Artemis or Demeter, so does he insist that she call herself "Tess d'Urberville" (30). When he discovers, on his honeymoon night, that Tess's experiences have indeed exceeded those of the convolvulus, he admits to romanticizing the d'Urbervilles but not to romanticizing nature. Tess, who is natural because she has a past, now appears as unnatural to Angel as she appeared, after returning home from The Slopes, to herself.

To repeat, Angel's condemnation of Tess externalizes her earlier condemnation of herself. Her conscience has tried--and indeed does so throughout the novel--to suppress her primitive emotions (risking their eventual explosive, destructive release) and thereby to hold the ghosts of her past at bay. Morrell rightly insists that "From the start of the book to the part entitled 'The Rally' [Hardy] is not suggesting that Tess is any the worse for the warmth of her impulses," but this provocative critic errs when he asserts

that Tess is the worse "for failing to control them with her conscience and her 'bright intelligence'" (93). For the conscience controls by stifling rather than by converting the heat of those impulses into creative energy. Hardy seems to imply as much when he refers contemptuously to "those creeds," of which the individual conscience is but an internalization, "which futilely attempt to check what wisdom would be content to regulate" (25).

It is possible to argue, by starting with an inquiry into the death of the Durbeyfields' horse, that Tess's glimpse (by way of her schoolwork) at that new world outside of Marlott, even as it has encouraged her to set her sights on someone of Angel's refinement, has made her all the more vulnerable to Alec--all the more vulnerable to her past--since it seems to have distanced her mind from her body. Holloway, who understands correctly that the d'Urbervilles' "acquiescence in chance" is manifest in the heroine's "dreaminess," mistakenly sees this dreaminess in the Tess who "tells her young brother that we live on a 'blighted' planet (and becomes so engrossed that she causes a fatal injury to the horse)" (271). Surely the "reverie" into which Tess falls, once Abraham leaves off his "childish prattle" about the family's newly discovered connections, results less from any hereditary "alienation"--as Holloway describes her mental state--than from

her contemplation of "the stars, whose cold pulses were beating amid the black hollows above, in serene dissociation from these two wisps of human life" (4). It is a reverie inspired by her brother's question, "Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?"--a question implying that his older sister has shared her lessons with the children. While her assertion that Earth, like an apple on "our stubborn-tree," is "blighted" reveals her peculiarly modern sensibility, the conviction has no foundation in her personal experience--she has yet to taste that blighted fruit. (Referring later to her fall, Hardy writes that "she had eaten of the tree of knowledge" [16].) This "alienation," this "dreaminess" (which indicates, in this scene, her "ache of modernism" [19]), and the "reverie" amid *The Chase* (which reveals her "acquiescence in chance") characterize opposite sides of the same self-divided psyche.

Moreover, excessive "thought on things" (as Hardy phrases it in "Afternoon Service at Mellstock") exacts the same penalty as "incautiousness of character"--that is, vulnerability to accident. The accidental death of the horse anticipates the ravishment of the heroine, also a chance collision: "that Prince's 'life's blood' spouts from his injured breast and splashes Tess with 'crimson drops' subtly prefigures," as Daniel Schwarz observes, "the

breaking of Tess's hymen" (29-30). Indeed, Tess is the story of the heroine's attempt to overcome the effects of the first collision as well as the second. Although "Nobody blamed Tess as she blamed herself" (4), guilt over the accident compels her to accompany Alec to Trantridge. The animal's fatal wound has become her own--one that she survives and must endure.³ She replaces Prince as "breadwinner" (4)--now as later, when the Durbeyfields lose their lease and she becomes Alec's whore, the embodiment of her "wound."

Of course, the death of Prince, which causes Tess to see herself "in the light of a murderess" (4), also foreshadows the murder of Alec. She stabs him as he "stabbed" her, inflicting on Alec the same wound as the horse's. It is a wholly physical, even an animalistic act--as if Tess and Prince have discovered a common identity in Alec's horse, Tib, itself a "d'Urberville."

³Tess's "wound"--literally her ruptured hymen and figuratively her fractured psyche--is a metaphor for her past. Similarly for the postilion, who drives the "d'Urberville" carriage that transports Tess and Angel to and from their wedding, the past survives within the present as "a permanent running wound on the outside of his right leg"--an ulcer resulting from the constant contact of his leg, in his youth, with a part of the coach. Hardy writes that the postilion "had stood at inn-doors doing nothing for the whole five-and-twenty years that had elapsed since he had no longer been required to ride professionally, as if expecting the old times to come back again" (33). In a sense, the old times painfully linger on.

(The story of this horse, which carries her to Trantridge, parallels the history of the d'Urberville family. According to Alec, Tib "has killed one chap"--as did a d'Urberville of the sixteenth or seventeenth century--"and just after I bought her she nearly killed me. And then . . . I nearly killed her" [8]--a succession of events that hints darkly at his future relationship with Tess.) The death of Alec, himself "a horsey young buck" (7), represents not only revenge for his "mastery" of Tess but also the climactic confrontation between two competing animals. In effect Tess has attempted to purge her wounded, natural self--that inflammation--by fighting fire with fire. Thus has she fulfilled herself as a d'Urberville--her present become the riot of her past.

III

The murder of Alec fails to extinguish that smoldering coal, her past. It has blazed into a firestorm of primitive, sexual impulses. (The type of crime, a stabbing, which avenges a seduction, suggests the sexual nature of the crime.) The question then remains: How should Tess have dealt with her past, which survived in traits traceable to a d'Urberville of the sixteenth or

seventeenth century and in impulses traceable to Freud's "man of prehistoric ages"?

Freud indirectly addresses this general concern in Civilization and Its Discontents, where he makes an analogy between wildfire and erotic instincts, which are hostile to civilization. When the wildfire, domesticated as a household fire, blazes on the hearth (whose guardian is woman), it testifies to man's success at transforming his own chaotic sexual heat into creative energy.

Hardy advances a similar concept in The Return of the Native, where his account of the heathfolks' celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day appears to be an allegory of man's emergence from a natural state into a human one--an allegory, in short, of the birth of civilization. Carrying furze-tufts, the heathfolk appear momentarily as bushes with legs, then they divest themselves of the vegetation and set it ablaze. The resulting bonfire, a species of household fire, which they then dance around, communicates with other such fires throughout the district.

Of fire festivals in general, Frazer writes in The Golden Bough: "it has been held that they are sun-charms or magical ceremonies intended, on the principle of imitative magic, to ensure a needful supply of sunshine for men, animals, and plants by kindling fires which mimic on earth the great source of light and heat in the sky" (744).

And summarizing the characteristics of "primitive ritual," he explains: "The rites are magical rather than propitiatory" in that "the desired objects are attained . . . by ceremonies which . . . are believed to influence the course of nature directly through a physical sympathy or resemblance between the rite and the effect which it is the intention of the rite to produce" (477).

Now when Hardy writes, in The Return of the Native, that "to light a fire . . . indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness" against both the regularity and the inscrutable chaos of the universe (1.3), he is supposing that these rites, if they cannot influence nature, do announce man's defiant resolve to create it anew. To light a fire is to snatch the sun from the sky and to domesticate it as a household fire.

The fire festival finds in Tess a counterpart in the work, at Marlott, of the harvesters who welcome the conscience-stricken Tess into their "commonwealth of hearts and hands"--Hardy's description, in The Return of the Native, of men and women bound not only by "external necessity," which (according to Freud) creates "the compulsion to work," but also by the even greater "power of love" (Freud 53). They "showed themselves sympathetic and glad at her reappearance out-of-doors" (14). In the "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier, Hardy advances a

formula, which bears on this scene, for the amelioration of human ills: "loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge" (558). Here at Marlott, "scientific knowledge" takes the concrete form of a scarlet reaping-machine, which outshines the sun. The harvesters, who completely control the machine (as the laborers at Flintcomb-Ash do not control the thresher, a "red tyrant"), seem almost to have harnessed the sun itself, as they have done the horses that pull the mower. As Hardy observes, regarding its four "broad arms," "The paint with which they were smeared, intensified in hue by the sunlight, imparted to them a look of having been dipped in liquid fire" (14).

Similar work at Talbothays unites Tess and Angel in a "commonwealth of hearts and hands," much as does Oak and Bathsheba's work together in Far from the Madding Crowd. Thus Tess is able to domesticate the "flame" (a wildfire such as she leapt into at Trantridge) that has threatened to consume herself as well as the other milkmaids--"the flame that was burning the inside of their hearts out" (23). The result is the couple's almost sacramental first hours of marriage: their "first fresh sense of sharing a habitation conjointly, the first meal together, the chatting by the fire with joined hands" (40).

More so than fire festivals, however, vestigial vegetation rites, based originally on a belief in "the

beneficent spirit of vegetation" (Frazer 371), recall in Jess the "magical" past. Still, Hardy's explanation of the "club-walking" at Marlott (a vegetation rite) echoes his description of the bonfire on Egdon Heath. He observes, in The Return of the Native, that "such blazes as this . . . are rather lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot" (1.3). In Jess he explains, "The forests have departed, but some old customs of their shades remain. Many, however, linger only in a metamorphosed or disguised form. The May Day dance, for instance, was to be discerned on the afternoon under notice in the guise of the club-revel, or 'club-walking,' as it was there called" (2). In the earlier novel Hardy writes of the "bonfire-makers" that "It was as if [they] had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot" (1.3), and later he writes of the dancing couples at the "gipsying" (a "village festivity" that recalls Guy Fawkes' Day and looks towards the Maypole-day Dance at the end of the novel) that "paganism was revived in their hearts" (4.3).

Unself-conscious participation in pagan rites returns the participants to their primitive origins. The example of the festive country dance (the most conspicuous example of local color in his work) leads Hardy to the same

conclusion as Arnold articulates in the famous closing lines of "Dover Beach." Moreover, this dance, through its descent from ceremonies attached to work, provides Hardy with a practical notion of what it means to be "true" to one another. Love for Hardy, while it does acquire a metaphysical reality in his poetry, is meaningless outside the broad context of man's attempt to make a home out of wilderness. By way of the dance in which established social and religious order dissolves, the modern couple arrives at the genesis of that attempt, when the creator man had only just been born.⁴

It is during the "club-walking" at Marlott that readers have their first glimpse of Tess. This promenade of local girls and a few women ends at the village green, where they take male partners and the dance itself begins. Here Angel--on holiday with his two brothers--first sees Tess. Failing initially to catch his eye, she loses the chance to dance with him. (Hardy blames this lost

⁴It is important to understand that the dance, even though the established, conventional order dissolves within it, is not the "wilderness" that D. H. Lawrence has in mind when he maintains that the "tragedy" of Hardy's heroes and heroines is that "of those who, more or less pioneers, have died in the wilderness, whither they had escaped for free action, after having left the walled security, and the comparative imprisonment, of the established conventions" (Phoenix 411). The dance, a stylized "commonwealth of hearts and hands," represents the original taming of that wilderness.

opportunity on Tess's "backwardness," her inclination to hang back and not assert herself--a tendency that anticipates later failures of nerve, first when her husband is deserting her, and later in his native village, where she has gone to beg assistance from his parents, when she overhears herself disparaged by his brothers.) The end of the chapter finds him, in pursuit of his brothers who have gone ahead, at the top of a rise. Looking back at the "whirling" circle of dancers, Angel sees that one "white shape stood apart by the hedge alone"--a white shape belonging, as he knows, to "the pretty maiden within whom he had not danced" (2).

Lawrence writes of Hardy's heroes and heroines that "all of them are struggling hard to come into being." For Lawrence theirs is "the struggle into love and the struggle with love: by love, meaning the love of a man for a woman and a woman for a man. . . . Having achieved and accomplished love, then the man passes into the unknown. He has become himself, his tale is told" (410). Tess's struggle takes shape as a search for a dancing-partner. Her failure to dance with Angel on the Marlott green haunts the novel, and her tale is not told until they have danced together, after the death of Alec, when "Each clasping the other round the waist, they promenaded over the dry bed of fir-needles" of a later May (57).

Angel's departure leaves Tess without a partner, but not because she lacks for one among the local boys. Rather, she is still holding out for Angel. An exceptional student, she has sensed (as no other schoolgirl has) something complementary to her own studious nature in this young man who speaks "so nicely." Thus she stands apart from the others, outside their circle. When the point of view shifts from Angel to Tess, Hardy observes that on account of Angel's hasty departure, "She had no spirit to dance again for a long time" (3). Tess, for whom Angel embodies a desperately desired social goal, deplores the lost opportunity. Merely an ornament to Angel of romantic rusticity, she appeared "so modest, so expressive, she had looked so soft in her thin white gown that he felt he had acted stupidly" in not choosing her (2). He refuses to acknowledge her conspicuous physicality, suggestive of loose morals, which even her "companions" label a "fault"-- a fault that later arouses Alec. Although she "had inherited the feature from her mother without the quality it denoted," Tess retains throughout the novel "the wretched sentiment . . . that in inhabiting the fleshly tabernacle with which Nature had endowed her, she was somehow doing wrong" (45). In time, no doubt, Angel too would have found it a sufficient "fault" that Tess

inhabited a fleshly tabernacle. At any rate, Tess soon becomes "but a transient impression, half forgotten" (5).

Even so, Hardy implies (and it is Tess's wish to believe) that if Angel had danced with her, her tale would have ended before it had begun. Her lack of a partner dooms her, as Hardy declares soon afterwards, "to be seen and coveted . . . by the wrong man" (5). Tess later asks Angel herself, "why didn't you stay and love me when I--was sixteen . . . and you danced on the green? Oh, why didn't you, why didn't you?" (31)! At any rate, Tess's story becomes, from this point onwards, a search for a dancing-partner, a mate--a search, in short, for a new home of her own, apart from the chaotic household of her parents.

Frazer notes "the profligacy which notoriously attended these [Maytime] ceremonies" (157). The Saturday-night revel in Chaseborough seems to represent the degeneration of the "club-walking" into orgy. Tess's seduction amid The Chase is a continuation of that orgiastic revel. Her "dance" with Alec thus distorts the dance she ought to have enjoyed with Angel, a dance that Tess later supposes would have led to "homemaking"--the fertile domesticity symbolized by hands joined in front of a household fire.

The episode that begins in Chaseborough and ends in the ancient wood, The Chase, reverses the earlier episode

at Marlott. The spring festival in Tess's native village began as a promenade and culminated in a dance on the green, where the couples danced in a circle as if around a May tree, a cosmic tree such as the one in the Durbeyfields' yard whose blighted apples are planets. In contrast, the later episode begins as a dance--Alec's satanic presence in the garden leading to the "outhouse," site of the dance, suggests the ghostly presence of a similar Tree of Knowledge--and culminates in a drunken promenade home. Tess's fastidiousness keeps her from dancing here with the coarse young man who invites her to "have a turn with me"--he is no Angel Clare (10). Thus she stands self-consciously apart from these dancers, as she did from her similarly rude companions at Marlott. Without Angel as her partner, Tess takes Alec's hand to "get shot of the screaming cats," and leaps from a "frying pan" into a the smoldering fire of her own sexual excitation. The "truly venerable tract of forest-land, one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primeval date," wherein she finds herself, is to a cultivated tree farm what a wildfire is to a hearthfire (5).

The maytime cerealia at the beginning of the novel finds a counterpart in the work of the harvesters whom Tess joins in August, after her return home from Trantridge.

This work, hardly less ceremonial than the earlier rite of spring, seems very much a dance, with "the whole bevy of [field-women] drawing together like dancers in a quadrille at the completion of a sheaf by each" (14).

The harvesters, as they mow, literally surround nature:

The narrow lane of stubble encompassing the field grew wider with each circuit [of the harvester], and the standing corn was reduced to a smaller area as the morning wore on. Rabbits, hares, snakes, rats, mice, retreated inwards as into a fastness, unaware of the ephemeral nature of their refuge and of the doom that awaited them later in the day, when, their covert shrinking to a more and more horrible narrowness, they were huddled together, friends and foes, till the last few yards of upright wheat fell also under the teeth of the unerring reaper, and they were every one put to death by the sticks and stones of the harvesters. (14)

Just as the May Day dance descends from the pagan worship of trees, this activity, which has also lost its "magic," descends from the pagan worship of grain. As Frazer explains, the corn-spirit (whose ceremonial death at

harvest-time, before natural decay has enfeebled it, insures its vigorous revival in the spring) can take the form of any one of a number of animals: "In one . . . of these shapes the corn-spirit is often believed to be present in the corn . . ." (518). He continues:

at harvest a number of wild animals . . . are commonly driven by the progress of the reaping into the last patch of standing corn, and make their escape from it as it is being cut down. So regularly does this happen that reapers and others often stand round the last patch of corn armed with sticks or guns, with which they kill the animals as they dart out of their last refuge among the stalks. Now, primitive man, to whom magical changes of shape seem perfectly credible, finds it most natural that the spirit of the corn, driven from his home in the ripe grain, should make his escape in the form of the animal which is seen to rush out of the last patch of corn as it falls under the scythe of the reaper. (537)

While no spirits inhabit the Marlott grain, the killing of the fleeing animals by the harvesters--together with the formal, dance-like movements of the women who

arrange the sheaves into stooks--reveals the ceremonial quality of the work. This work is a celebration of man's ability, when he is united with his fellows not only by "external necessity" but also by Eros, to give nature human form. Although without a partner of her own, Tess no longer stands apart from the circle of "dancers." By working hand in hand with those whose hearts go out to her--by sharing their affection--Tess ceases (if temporarily) to view herself as a criminal who has violated natural law.

As the "club-walking" at Marlott degenerates into orgy at Chaseborough, so does the work at Marlott--and so also does the work at Talbothays, where the workfolk, arm in arm, "overhaul [the] mead" to eradicate the garlic--so does work degenerate into "sport" at Flintcomb-Ash. When it comes time here for the "ratting" (an activity reminiscent of the stoning and clubbing of animals fleeing the teeth of the reaper), "men unconnected with the threshing sometimes dropped in for that performance--sporting characters" (48). "Pandemonium"--all hell--breaks loose when one of the rats invades Marian's skirts (48). Hardy's obvious contempt for these "sporting characters" finds a parallel in William Faulkner's disdain, in Go Down, Moses, for the swampers and the townsmen, dressed in brand-new hunting clothes, who

turn the "pageant-rite" of a hunt for an almost mythical bear into a "spectacle" (224). At Flintcomb-Ash the sport testifies to the general collapse there of the "commonwealth of hearts and hands" despite the solicitude that prevails amongst the former milkmaids.

Laissez-faire economics, which pits man against man, engaging him in a struggle analogous to the battle with elemental nature that he hoped, through his inventiveness, to escape--this system has transformed the scarlet machine at Marlott into a "red tyrant" at Flintcomb-Ash (47). The operator of the machine, the so-called "engineer," has only an economic interest in the work--as does his employer, the tenant farmer, agent of an absentee landlord. These represent the extension into the rural community of the exploitativeness of the urban marketplace, whose lack of "loving-kindness" made the Victorian hearth and home a sanctuary for merchants and industrialists. Working atop the machine, Tess unties sheaves, which she then hands to a man who feeds them into the thresher--"For some probably economical reason it was usually a woman who was chosen for this particular duty, and Groby gave as his motive in selecting Tess that she was one of those who best combined strength with quickness in untying, and both with staying power, and this," Hardy insists, "may have been true" (47). Tess seems for a while to become an extension of the

machine, yet her endurance (which justifies her selection by the farmer) underscores at least her animal adaptability.

If an alliance between the tenant farmer and the engineer represents the economic system in force, Alec (whose merchant father made his fortune according to that system's "natural laws") represents its legacy. Thanks to the arrival here of Alec, who lacks even an economic stake in the work, the scene fuses (as Arnold Kettle puts it) "the personal and social and natural and economic aspects of Tess's fate into an unforgettable visual picture" (22).

When Alec joins her atop the machine, he does not join in her labor. Rather he attempts to seduce her away from it. The incident is a perversion of the single most memorable episode in the pastoral Far from the Madding Crowd, where Oak and Bathsheba work hand in hand atop a rick during a storm. Instead of "joining hands" with Alec and thereby jumping again into a firestorm, Tess grabs up one of her "leather gloves" and "passionately" swings it "by the gauntlet directly in his face" (47). As she has mastered the phallic "red tyrant," thus momentarily does she master Alec--as his bitter response discloses, "I was your master once!" (47).

The scene repeats itself later in March at Marlott, when Tess is working at night in a patch of garden allotted to her family. A fire of couch-grass, a domesticated fire, is burning. Alec appears, working (it seems) at her side. If their gardening together seems at first to be a "dance" around that fire (an attenuated fire festival), Hardy quickly disabuses the reader of the possibility. It is a burlesque, as Alec admits: he is Satan, The Other, come to tempt Eve. His quote from Milton puts in other words his invitation to her at Flintcomb-Ash. "'Empress, the way is ready, and not long, / Beyond a row of myrtles,'" says Milton's Satan to Eve (50). Previously Alec urged Tess, "my trap is waiting just under the hill" (47). These two propositions recall his two earlier ones, first when he, a Satanic figure in the garden at Chaseborough (scene of the orgiastic revel), offered, "I'll hire a trap and drive you home with me," and later that same night when he arrived on horseback to rescue Tess from the "screaming cats" (10). Then as now he is inviting Tess to leap again into the fire, to eat again of the Tree of Knowledge.

At Flintcomb-Ash, where economics presses scientific knowledge into the service of natural man, and in her scenes with Alec--there and in the plot at Marlott--Tess must compete as an animal for survival. Her physical

stamina, far more than the solicitude of the former milkmaids, enables her to prevail.

Still, she needs someone to work with her; she cannot garden alone. (For Hardy, as for Freud, the family, and not the man who labors by himself, is the microcosm of civilization.) Her helpmate must complement her own creative self; for Tess is, potentially, one of Hardy's creators--self-consciously modern individuals whose accidental confrontation with their primitive selves has stopped their flight from the past. Their abstract sense survives the dissolution of established moral and social order, and they return from the confrontation charged with primitive vitality.

At Talbothays, scene of a pastoral interlude, much of the imagery associated with dance and work coalesces subtly in the sequence of events leading to Tess and Angel's marriage. First take an obvious example where these two perform, in concert with others, an activity clearly analogous to the reaping at Marlott--the scene in which the dairymen and -maids comb the pasture for garlic that has tainted the butter:

they formed themselves into line, all assisting.
. . . With eyes fixed upon the ground they crept slowly across a strip of the field, returning a

little further down in such a manner that when they should have finished, not a single inch of the pasture but would have fallen under the eye of some one of them.

Hardy's elaborate description of their activity also links it to the "club-walking" at Marlott. Indeed, the activity acquires an almost magical glow: "As they crept along, stooping low to discern the plant, a soft yellow gleam was reflected from the buttercups into their shaded faces, giving them an elfish, moonlit aspect, though the sun was pouring upon their backs in all the strength of noon" (22). Soon afterwards, when Angel has the opportunity to carry each of four dairymaids in turn across the flooded road, the promenade becomes, perhaps, a minuet.

Tess, who lost her turn with Angel on the Marlott green, now has her turn with him. Actually their "dance" together begins some time before they meet at the flooded road. Over breakfast one morning, Angel (who plays the harp) is "conning one of his music-scores." In the fireplace a "pirouetting" flame seems "to jig to his inward tune." Tess, whom Angel's harp-playing later hypnotizes, seems also to be following that tune. For her assertion, which establishes sympathy between herself and Angel--"I don't know about ghosts, . . . but I do know that our souls can be made to go outside our bodies when we are alive"

(18)--anticipates her loss of consciousness of time and space that comes one night soon afterwards when Angel's music holds her "like a fascinated bird" (19). Outdoors, Tess finds herself on "[t]he outskirts of [a] garden . . . [that] had been left uncultivated for some years." It is as if a cat (her body) were stalking that bird (her soul) when Hardy writes, "She went stealthily as a cat through this profusion of growth, . . . rubbing off upon her naked arms sticky blights which, though snow-white on the apple-tree trunks, made madder stains on her skin" (19). (Here Tess is staining herself red again with Knowledge.) Now enthralled by Angel's harp-playing as earlier by his "nice" way of speaking, she is taking the first step in a dance with him, a dance in which the cat will seize the bird. Or as Hardy puts it later, "Amid the oozing fatness and warm ferments of the Froom Vale . . . , it was impossible that the most fanciful love should not grow passionate" (24).

It is right after Angel dances the milkmaids across the flooded road that they all meet their primitive selves. The milkmaids "writhed feverishly" (23). In the summer days that follow, when "the Thermidorian weather . . . seemed an effort on the part of Nature to match the state of hearts at Talbothays Dairy" (24), work almost grinds to a halt. "[Q]uick and unreflecting," Angel leaves off his milking and "clasp[s] [Tess] in his arms," who "yield[s] to

his embrace with unreflecting inevitableness" (24). Angel becomes for her an object of sexual desire as well as the embodiment of social refinement. When Angel's avowal of love yields a proposal of marriage, it seems more an enticement to jump from the frying pan into the fire than an incentive to begin "homemaking." Her animal instincts aroused, Tess reacts competitively towards the other girls: "I can't bear to let anybody have him but me" (28)! When Angel asks her, "Do you care for me?" Tess responds physically: "She clasped his neck, and for the first time Clare learnt what an impassioned woman's kisses were like" (30).

Unhappily for Tess, Angel's love is just not sexual enough: "He loved her dearly, though perhaps rather ideally and fancifully than with the impassioned thoroughness of her feeling for him" (32). He cannot as yet meet Tess at that terrifying level of existence which her own experience has made it possible for her to reach. After their estrangement, Hardy offers this comment: "Some might risk the odd paradox that with more animalism he would have been the nobler man" (36). But not even midsummer at Talbothays fevers the beast within him.

That heat awaits him in Brazil. According to an entry in one of Hardy's literary notebooks, "The tropics are the norma of nature . . . the standard . . . type by wh. we

must explain all the rest of nature, both in man & beast, in plant & animal. . . . Men feel themselves in closer touch than elsewhere with the ultimate facts & truths of nature . . . " (6). Only after his "tropical education," can Angel really begin to partner Tess, in an empty manor house that "corresponds," as Holloway observes, "to the ancient house where their marriage was so nearly consummated before" (279). "If way to the Better there be," Hardy asserts in "In Tenebris," "it exacts a full look at the Worst"--a look, perhaps, at the beast whose cage is one's conventional self.

For Holloway Tess is unified by "a single metaphor"-- "the hunting of [an animal]." "Tess," he writes, "is harried from place to place at what seems like gradually increasing speed. . . . When the hunt is over, Tess is captured on the sacrificial stone at Stonehenge, the stone where once, like the hart at bay, the victim's throat was slit with the knife" (277). Holloway convincingly identifies Tess with the "white hart" of the legend associated with the heroine's native Vale of Blakemore, "known in former times as the Forest of White Hart" (Tess 2).

Even so, it is more provocative and consistent with the novel's rites and ceremonies to see Tess as the spirit

of vegetation (whether a tree-spirit at a May Day celebration or a corn-spirit at harvest-time), whose death is often the climax of these festive occasions. As Frazer explains, "the killing of the representative of the tree-spirit in spring . . . is associated always . . . implicitly, and sometimes explicitly also, with a revival or resurrection of him in a more youthful and vigorous form" (349). The killing of the corn-mother, according to Frazer, expresses "the same ancient modes of thought" (475-6). As a field-woman at Marlott, Tess is one with the grain: "she has . . . imbibed the essence of her surrounding, and assimilated herself with it" (14). Thus she "moves forward, gathering the corn . . . , holding the corn in an embrace like that of a lover" (14). When she rallies in the spring, it is as if the spirit of vegetation, slain by the reapers, has revived (a tree-spirit now) "in a more youthful and vigorous form": "some spirit within her rose automatically as the sap in the twigs. It was unexpended youth, surging up anew" (15).

Angel, while sleepwalking at Wellbridge amid the ruins of an abbey church, lays his "dead" bride to rest in "the empty stone coffin of an abbot." This scene, of course, prefigures the "sacrifice" of Tess at Stonehenge, where lawmen encircle her much as the reapers at Marlott and the threshers at Flintcomb-Ash surround the "lesser" creatures

there. If the "sleepwalking" scene at Wellbridge is also an attenuated vegetation rite, why is it, then, that instead of hope, a "mood of long-suffering" (37) revives in Tess, a mood that suits her new life at Flintcomb-Ash?

Tess, the spirit of vegetation whose resurrection follows that scene, becomes a scapegoat. In addition to those customs which meant death and rejuvenation for the tree-spirit or corn-spirit, Frazer describes similar ones to banish evil. The purpose behind these other customs, which involved a scapegoat, was society's revival. Often, as in "the European folk-custom of 'carrying out Death,'" the ritualistic expulsion of evil combined with the vegetation rite. Frazer observes that "in this ceremony the so-called Death . . . originally the spirit of vegetation, who was annually slain in spring, in order that he might come to life again with all the vigour of youth . . . was not merely the dying god of vegetation, but also a public scapegoat, upon whom were laid all the evils that had afflicted the people during the past year" (668).

When the spokesman for the lawmen who encircle Tess at Stonehenge emerges "from the hollow beyond the [flame-shaped] Sun-stone" (58)--as if he were the representative also of the sun--the "fire festival" (also a vegetation rite) that now begins seems less a sun-charm than a purificatory rite. In fact an alternative interpretation

of fire festivals, which Frazer himself prefers to the one already advanced, holds that "the ceremonial fires have no necessary reference to the sun but are simply purificatory in intention." From this perspective fire is "a fierce destructive power which blasts and consumes all the noxious elements, whether spiritual or material, that menace the life of men, of animals, and of plants" (744).

Certainly the lawmen, who honor Angel's plea to "[l]et her finish her sleep" (58), display neither fierceness nor even the abhorrence towards Tess that the participants in a purificatory rite typically show towards the scapegoat. Linked as if arm in arm, they are, in a sense, working creatively, surrounding nature much as do the harvesters at Marlott with their scarlet reaping-machine, and the crew at Talbothays with "old pointed knives" for eradicating an "inimical plant" (22).

But as a microcosm of the established social and moral order (an abstract wilderness that chokes out human life no less than does the lawless wilderness), the circle of lawmen is destructive. The scapegoat Tess who is its victim pays not only for killing Alec but also for yielding to him--occurrences that equally implicate her "incautiousness of character," her "acquiescence in chance." The moralist, having himself inherited these natural traits from a common ancestor, labels them

unnatural, suppresses them, and consigns the fate of Tess to "the President of the Immortals" (a personification of moral law), who sports with her as do the "ratters" with the rats at Flintcomb-Ash. As Tennyson's Isolt might say to all of them, "But thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild beasts . . . art grown wild beast thyself" (The Last Tournament, lines 630-2).

When Tess tells Angel that Liza-Lu, her sister, "has all the best of me without the bad of me," she is giving voice to her conscience (58). Tess is wrong. While Liza-Lu has neither fallen into "error" nor committed murder, the d'Urberville whom Tess has proved herself to be revives in this "a tall budding creature," whose d'Urberville blood belies her "spiritualized" appearance (59). At the end of the novel Angel and Liza-Lu (a surrogate Tess), whom Angel walks with "hand in hand," resume the "promenade," which promises for now to tame that blood and make a home out of the wilderness.

From Root-Light to Starlight:
Radicalism in Hardy's Poetry

In Thomas Hardy and British Poetry Donald Davie labels Hardy a "scientific humanist"--someone who believes, as Hardy declares (in the "Apology" to Late lyrics and Earlier), that "loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge," offers the best hope man has of minimizing his "pain" and that of the "kindred animal races" (The Complete Poems 557-8). Davie sees unfortunate results of this common-sensical, unmythical doctrine in both the form and the content of Hardy's poetry: the poetry seems the work, alternately, of a self-indulgent engineer, bent on designing elaborate, over-ingenious stanzas, and of the laboratory technician, reluctant to extend his commentary beyond observable, statistically meaningful reality. Where other poets conduct their readers to a transcendent, visionary realm, accessible only by the imagination and somehow "truer" than the realm of the senses, Hardy accepts the sensory world--"quantifiable reality or the reality of common sense"--as "'given'" and "final" (61-2).¹ Davie desperately wants Hardy to be

¹This argument follows on a much earlier one by David Perkins, who sees as a limitation Hardy's mistrust of the Romantic visionary imagination. According to Perkins (in his article "Hardy and the Poetry of Isolation"), Hardy's verse is saved only by the poet's own suspicion that his

"radical"--that is, visionary or transcendental. (Davie writes of "roots," but his idea of radicalism relates less to the roots of the cosmic tree than to its cloud-enshrouded, uppermost branches.) As it is, according to Davie, Hardy "sold the vocation short" (62).

If the weakness of Davie's provocative and useful book (which proceeds to argue that Hardy's scientific humanism accounts for the constricted scope of much recent British poetry) lies in its concentration on the "scientific" at the expense of the humanistic side of the poet's secular faith, there is exactly the opposite imbalance in Davie's highly original article "Hardy's Virgilian Purples." This piece calls into question the thesis of Thomas Hardy and British Poetry by ingeniously arguing that, at least for the Hardy of the "Poems of 1912-13" (the series of elegiac stanzas on the death of his first wife, Emma, in Satires of Circumstance), love has a metaphysical reality. Here Davie does similar violence to Hardy's definition of scientific humanism by treating "loving-kindness" as independent of the "scientific knowledge" through which, as Hardy says, it must operate. In "Hardy's Virgilian Purples," Davie discovers "radicalism" in Hardy.

lack of a visionary imagination is a peculiarly personal deficiency (253-70).

Hardy is indeed radical, but his radicalism is as true to the etymology of a word meaning "root" as Davie's understanding of it is false. Hardy's radicalism, inseparable from his regionalism, begins metaphorically at the fiery roots of the cosmic tree and extends from there into its radiant crown. At the end of the "Apology," Hardy restates the formula--"loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge"--when he voices his hope of "an alliance between religion" (synonymous with "loving-kindness") "and complete rationality" (synonymous with "scientific knowledge") "by means of the interfusing effect of poetry" (561-2). A poem, then--even when, as often happens, it concerns the collapse of that alliance--represents iconographically the operation of "loving-kindness" through "scientific knowledge" as well as the fusion of "religion" and "complete rationality"--a marriage of content and form.

That fusion is evident in the labor that Oak and Bathsheba perform atop the rick during the storm in Far from the Madding Crowd. This image of a man and a woman at work to preserve the harvest--to preserve the home they have made out of nature--metamorphoses into an image of men and women dancing around a bonfire in The Return of the Native, an image emblematic of "the commonwealth of hearts and hands." As a form of hearthfire, the bonfire

symbolizes the fertile domesticity that comes with the self-conscious taming of natural, anti-social aggressions and, by extension, with the application of at least an elementary scientific knowledge to the reclamation of untillable ground.

The family tree that metaphorically blossoms from a domestic hearth not only connects the underworld of the human psyche with the heaven of the mind but also spans the cosmos. The radicalism of Hardy's poetry translates the dance of couples around the glowing base of that tree into the movement of heavenly bodies, which cluster within its branches, and a "happy goodnight air" into the symphonic music of the spheres.

In Hardy's poetry transcendence comes not through the abandonment of human fellowship for the illusory harmoniousness of the natural state (of which corrupt human society is merely an extension) or for the knowledge that brings intellectual detachment. Rather, transcendence comes through the domestication of wild, human nature and through the related cultivation of elemental nature. Only through a continuous return to his roots--only through a continuous reenactment of the quintessential regional tale, of lovers at work to make a home out of the wilderness--does man evolve.

I

Consideration of two short poems, "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" and "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" will establish the extremes of the major poems to be studied here, extremes that range from the desolation of "The Darkling Thrush," with its neglected household fire, to the cosmic fellowship of "To Meet, or Otherwise," with its "symphony of human tenderness" that moves the stars (310). "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" and "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" each consisting of three quatrains, both appear in Moments of Vision, Hardy's finest single volume. Yet "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" contemplates the lack of fusion between "religion" and "complete rationality," while "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'" succinctly images forth Hardy's regionalism, which is expressive of that fusion.

A deceptively simple poem, "Afternoon Service at Mellstock," set around 1850, seems at first reading merely a nostalgic celebration of the unself-conscious child's oneness with nature, a pre-Darwinian world of things. In fact, the poem hovers over a void. Nothing in it affirms the speaker's humanity--certainly not his childish identification with "things," and neither the afternoon

service nor the later "subtle thought" that replaces, in his maturity, the "psalming" of his childhood:

On afternoons of drowsy calm
 We stood in the panelled pew,
 Singing one-voiced a Tate-and-Brady psalm
 To the tune of 'Cambridge New'.

We watched the elms, we watched the rooks,
 The clouds upon the breeze,
 Between the whiles of glancing at our books,
 And swaying like the trees.

So mindless were those outpourings!--
 Though I am not aware
 That I have gained by subtle thought on things
 Since we stood psalming there. (429)

"Subtle thought" and "things"--this dichotomy, indicative of the Cartesian split, calls attention to the two classes of imagery, abstract and concrete, that shape the poem. Yet only between thought and things is there real opposition. The "drowsy calm," the breeze, the "mindless outpourings"--the abstractions to be classed with the equally airy thought, which comes to replace them--all belong to the same world as the "panelled pew," the elms, the rooks, the clouds--an integrated world of which the

congregation also is a part. In 1850, the approximate date of the service, a "drowsy calm" prevailed both inside and outside the church--outdoors as a breeze and indoors as "psalming," as "mindless outpourings." The "psalming" (which is to the congregation what the breeze is to the elms) seems no more distinguishable from the breeze than the people do from the trees, whose "swaying" theirs resembles. In fact, the "psalming" seems itself to have resembled more a natural phenomenon than a human one. It was not the trees that swayed as if to music but rather the congregation that swayed as to a breeze. As much as anything, the music seems to have encouraged the congregation's identification with the things of nature.

What harm was there in this harmony with their surroundings? Nature hardly seemed threatening to the congregation, which (like Hardy in 1850) was still enjoying a Romantic, Wordsworthian childhood. (The poet speaks for the whole congregation and not simply for himself as a child.) As an adult Victorian, Hardy knows, as is indicated by his poem "'According to the Mighty Working'" (571), which reflects his scientific knowledge, that the natural world still seems, a half century after Darwin, to exude a "drowsy calm." Nature may indeed be "red in tooth and claw," as the nearsighted Tennyson saw it even in 1850; but to the ordinary eye, an alluring peace appears to

prevail. As Hardy insists (in "'According to the Mighty Working'"), however, this "Peace" is a "hid riot" called "Change," which is always proceeding, though "Outside perception's range." Nature is threatening precisely because it does seem so peaceful, at least compared to the warring of mankind. In 1850 the poet and the congregation in "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" were all one with "peaceful" nature, and as such they were as good as asleep to its riot.

It is the business of civilization, of which formal religion is a conspicuous feature, to arouse self-consciousness, to dispel the "drowsy calm"--as musical instruments and human voices raised in song create intelligible sound from wind. And yet the "breeze" that passed through this congregation's collective windpipe remained mere wind. Although Hardy specifically identifies it as "a Tate-and-Brady psalm" sung to the tune of "Cambridge New," the psalming--far from exciting an awareness of their fellowship--lulled the congregation in unison into an identification with the trees. (The "panelled pew" appears no less a tree than it once was.) Hardy's religion, loving-kindness, seeks to bind people with people, but not with nature--as did this "natural religion." It put them to sleep, and thus they could not have taken "a full look at the Worst" even if they had had

the scientific knowledge to do so. (In the "Apology," where Hardy defends himself against the charge of pessimism, he reiterates his conviction, as enunciated in "In Tenebris II," "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." Scientific knowledge alone enables man to take "a full look at the Worst.")

In a letter quoted in his autobiography, Hardy declares, "to model our conduct on Nature's apparent conduct . . . can only bring disaster to humanity" (Life 339). As a modern intellectual for whom "subtle thought" has replaced natural piety, the speaker of the poem has passed from an innocently ignorant identification with sensuous "things" to a scientific contemplation of them--as has Clym Yeobright, whose "complete rationality" enables him to regard nature from an intellectual height, but destroys his capacity to love. For love involves physical drives that pass unacknowledged in the sterile kingdom of the mind. "Afternoon Service at Mellstock" thus offers no image of genuine fellowship, of loving-kindness, only the sterility of complete rationality, on the one hand, and the sleepiness of a communion with nature, on the other.

"In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations'" (which appears, perhaps ironically, in a section of Moments of Vision devoted to "Poems of War and Patriotism") presents in each

of its three stanzas, or panels, an emblematic image that seems at first discrete:

I

Only a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame
From the heaps of couch-grass;
Yet this will go onward the same
Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight
Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die. (543)

The opening stanza offers an allegory of man's domestication of nature, which involves him in a kind of dance. By "harrowing clods," he is extracting couch-grass from the hard earth, which he is readying for cultivation. He has the aid of "an old horse," itself an example of domesticated nature. Thom Gunn, in an intelligent reading

of the poem, insists on the accuracy of "stalk": "the word does properly indicate the stiff, ungraceful movement of the man and the old horse over the bare earth and, by implication, over the centuries" (21). It seems that the man, alert, is leading the pliant horse in an awkward dance that affirms the man's dominion over nature. More important is the dance in which this laborer participates with every other man who, "over the centuries," ever drove a horse. Wendell Berry of Kentucky, an eloquent apologist for the agrarian life, grasps this concept perfectly. In a poem of his, called simply "Horses," he tells how, as a boy, he learned to plow with horses. Then "The tractors came." Years later, when he "came to / a farm, some it it unreachable by machines," he had recourse "to a team, a pair / of mares . . . to keep my sloping fields." As a boy he had "learned the other tongue / by which men spoke to beasts." Now,

Going behind them, the reins
 tight over their backs as they stepped
 their long strides, revived
 again on my tongue the cries
 of dead men in the living
 fields. Now every move
 answers what is still.
 This work of love rhymes

living and dead. A dance
 is what this plodding is.
 A song, whatever is said. (225-7)

Through this labor, the application of an elementary "scientific knowledge," Berry in 1980 and the "man harrowing clods" in 1915 join hands with each other and with all men who have ever done this kind of work--in a dance, a "commonwealth of hearts and hands."

The second stanza is a continuation of the first, for the "couch-grass" here burning came from the harrowed clods. It is true that the "thin smoke without flame" evidences a fire whose purpose is to destroy the couch-grass, which Gunn perceptively describes as "the perennial weed, that invades the fields humans have cultivated, and will continue to do so, and that has been gathered in heaps to burn by the humans, who continue their temporary defeats of it" (21). But from another perspective this fire is no more destructive than a hearthfire. For it is not so much destroying a profligate thing of nature (which, if left unchecked, will efface all evidence of human labor) as transforming it into its opposite: the fertilizer that will assist in cultivation. Like the hearthfire, this fire symbolizes fertile domesticity.

Hardy describes, in his novel Desperate Remedies, a similar attempt to reclaim land from what "for many years

had been looked upon as irreclaimable waste" (10.2). Here a fire of couch-grass reveals, when it flares up and burns out of control, how easily even a domestic fire can become hellish. Just as the weed must be continuously controlled lest it overrun the fields, the fire (which transforms the promiscuous weed into something fertile) must be tended lest it become like the weed that fuels it. How fragile, Hardy implies, is man's dominion over nature--how demanding of constancy! This realization no doubt qualifies the optimistic assertion that the burning of the couch-grass "will go onward the same / Though dynasties pass." Perhaps the allusion to war (in the last stanza) owes as much to Hardy's appreciation of what happens when man loses his battle with nature as to the historical context of World War I. Nature, in the form of instinctive aggressiveness (which constantly threatens civilization), has triumphed in men at war.

Hardy's unqualified optimism finally settles on the courtship of the "maid and her wight." Metaphorically, so long as the couple's hands stay joined, domesticity will prevail. It is Hardy's faith--or at least his "almost instinct," as Philip Larkin puts it, that their hearthfire will still illuminate the dark when the firestorms of war have burned themselves out: "War's annals will cloud into night / Ere their story die"--or as Larkin (one of Hardy's

keenest apostles) tentatively asserts in his poem "An Arundel Tomb," "What will survive of us is love" (The Whitsun Weddings 46).

II

The choice between a nostalgic identification with nature or a quasi-religious allegiance to the human community, which puts the individual at odds with nature, confronts the speaker of "The Darkling Thrush" (150). The first stanza of this, Hardy's best-known poem opens with one image and closes with another, contrasting one--a solitary man outdoors in the dead of winter and everyone else at hearthside with his household, keeping warm:

I leant upon a coppice gate
 When Frost was spectre-gray,

 And all mankind that haunted nigh
 Had sought their household fires.

Like a ghost himself, haunting the copse (which winter has stormed), the poet is consorting with a ghost, the frost personified, rather than with the other living souls who huddle indoors, their color restored by the warmth of

their household fires. Why has the poet alone forsaken his hearth to risk his death of cold?

Spoken by a would-be nature poet who wants nature to be other than the inhospitable place that Hardy--a scientific humanist--knows it to be, "The Darkling Thrush" is the lament of a latecomer contemplating a landscape haunted by the ghosts of earlier, model poets. A composite of their corpses, the landscape also is a projection of his own dead youth, a youth spent "swaying like the trees." The death of that youth coincided with the demise of romantic self-identification with nature in 1859, which saw the publication of Darwin's The Origin of Species right as Hardy himself, born in 1840, was entering adulthood. The man at the gate, "fervourless" and very likely as "spectre-gray" as the frost, is the ghost of that youth, who (like the personified "youth" in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale") grew "pale, and spectre-thin, and die[d]" (line 26). The revival of its corpse is the misplaced hope of Hardy's poet, whose mentors remain those poets who glorified childhood and trumpeted mankind's potential transcendence, through nature, of the corrupted social self. What he fails to understand is that "blessed Hope" (to paraphrase the ironical concluding lines) inheres not in the "happy goodnight air" of a weather-beaten yet still Romantic bird,

but rather in the tunes to which the rest of mankind may now be dancing amid the glow of household fires.

When Tennyson's Ulysses (during a period of spellbinding scientific revelations that were paving the way for Darwin) abandons hearth and home, he does so in quest of knowledge. "I love not Man the less, but Nature more," declared the Byron of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, whom Shelley had put under the spell of Wordsworth (4.78.1598). Tennyson's Ulysses, the quintessential Victorian romantic, might have asserted, "I love not Man the less, but Knowledge more." The poet of "The Darkling Thrush" rejects the Victorian romanticism of Tennyson's Ulysses (as well as the realism of the common-sensical householders) in the nostalgic hope of becoming a Romantic on the order of Wordsworth or Shelley.

To the autumnal West Wind Shelley prayed, "Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is" (line 57). Hardy's imagery-- "The tangled bine-stems scored the sky / Like strings of broken lyres"--implies an ironical answer to the prayer.²

²Dennis Taylor, in his study of Hardy's poems, omits "Ode to the West Wind" from his list of seven poems that echo in "The Darkling Thrush" (145). Yet the later poem owes the other one not only the forest-as-lyre simile but also the complex comparison of "The land's sharp features" with a "corpse"--"His crypt the cloudy canopy, / The wind his death-lament." Shelley, too, hears the West Wind as a "dirge"--the dirge "Of the dying year, to which this closing night / Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre, / Vaulted with all thy congregated might // Of vapours" (lines 23-8).

To be played upon, as a lyre, by the mild, autumnal West Wind is to be unstrung by the winter wind that cuts through England. While nature may appear as Italy does in autumn, science has shown it to be in fact as pitilessly austere as England in winter--or even as Iceland. As soon as this knowledge fixes itself in the popular mind, as Hardy observes in The Return of the Native, it will so transform the general temperament that "to the commonest tourist" (and not simply to "the more thinking among mankind") "spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle gardens of South Europe are to him now" (1.1). "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Shelley asks rhetorically at the end of the ode (line 70). And it is true, as Hardy modestly notes (in "Before and after Summer"), that "Looking forward to the spring / One puts up with anything." But soon

. . . those happy suns are past,
 Fore-discerned in winter last.
 When went by their pleasure, then?
 I, alas, perceived not when. (333)

For Hardy winter is the one reality.

From the perspective of the man leaning upon the
 coppice gate,

The ancient pulse of germ and birth
 Was shrunken hard and dry,
 And every spirit upon earth
 Seemed fervourless as I.

If Shelley's ghost flits among the bine-stems, then Wordsworth's haunts this barren scene, which the "carolings" of the thrush can do nothing to transform. In a poem of Wordsworth's ("To the Cuckoo"), where a cuckoo "babbles" somewhere out of sight, this earlier poet

Can lie upon the plain
 And listen, till I do beget
 That golden time again. (492)

That "golden time" comprises the "visionary hours" of his "schoolboy days"--an earlier spring when first he heard the cuckoo sing. Now, years later, Mother Nature (whom Wordsworth has taken as his "bride") is in labor with yet another spring. The birdsong, which gives voice to the nascent season, fertilizes the poet's memory of that golden time, which now germinates within the present and comes to birth. With stunning simplicity of statement, Wordsworth is dramatizing an argument advanced in the "Prospectus" to The Recluse:

Paradise, and groves
 Elysian, Fortunate Fields--like those of old
 Sought in the Atlantic Main--why should they be
 A history only of departed things,
 Or a mere fiction of what never was?
 For the discerning intellect of Man,
 When wedded to this goodly universe
 In love and holy passion, shall find these
 A simple produce of the common day.

(lines 47-55)

The womb into which Wordsworth has sown the seeds of his intellect becomes, in "The Darkling Thrush," a tomb. Symbolic (in Hardy's poem) of a Darwinian view of nature, as opposed to the Wordsworthian notion of a "goodly universe," the English winter has, as it were, killed off Wordsworth (as well as Shelley). Perhaps among the spirits "upon earth," there is Wordsworth, still lying "upon the plain," but "fervourless" (now that the weather is freezing), "spectre-gray" within a winding sheet of frost.

It is a winding sheet shared also by the corpse of the poet's own childhood--a childhood that made him the heir of those earlier poets of nature. His own unconscious appreciation of nature, as dramatized in "Afternoon Service at Mellstock," was no different from theirs. But for him, the continuity between childhood and adulthood, which

Wordsworth found in love of nature--"The child is father to the man / And I could hope my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety"--was broken by the revelations of The Origin of Species. Cut off from himself as a child and from his Romantic forebears, the poet drifts, with Matthew Arnold, "between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born" ("Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse," lines 85-6).

Meanwhile, "The land's sharp features seemed to be / The Century's corpse outleant." Labeling that last word "eccentric even by Hardy's standards," John Bayley (in An Essay on Hardy) shrewdly concludes,

A corpse cannot itself lean on anything--on a flat surface it can only lie--but its stiffness could be leant, say against a gate . . . [T]he century's corpse, when one comes to think of it, is leant in reflective pose, much as Hardy himself is. (37-8)

Bayley does not say so, but the corpse thus seems, if not precisely an extension of the man himself, a projection of his awareness that the "natural piety" of his childhood has gone the way of Arnold's Christianity.

One Romantic "poet," in the form of a thrush, has survived. Birds for the Romantics--a cuckoo for Wordsworth, a skylark for Shelley, a nightingale for Keats--represented the ideal poet. For them, too, the external world of "rocks and stones and trees" was always evanescing into an "unsubstantial, faery place" (as in Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo"), inhabited by these unseen birds, which they idealized as disembodied birdsong, pure Song. Apostrophizing the cuckoo, Wordsworth asked, "shall I call thee Bird, / Or but a wandering Voice?" and concluded, "thou art to me / No bird, but an invisible thing, / A voice, a mystery." Similarly Shelley hailed the skylark as a "blithe Spirit," asserted, "Bird thou never wert," and compared it with "an unbodied joy." Heard before it is seen, Hardy's joyful thrush--especially since it is "darkling"--could well turn out to be a disembodied voice:

At once a voice arose among
 The bleak twigs overhead
 In a full-hearted evensong
 Of joy illimited . . .

Once seen, however, the thrush--"An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small, / In blast-beruffled plume"--comes to

embody the pathos of the Romantic poet who survives into post-Darwinian times and still professes his natural piety.

"Darkling"--what an odd adjective for a bird so plainly seen! True, it is dusk, and the time of day is as significant as the time of year and the year itself: 31 December 1900--it is literally the twilight of the nineteenth century. But there is another dark in which the thrush is caroling--the dark of unself-consciousness, unpenetrated by the light of reason.

Keats, who hides his nightingale amid the "verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways" of branches, uses "darkling" to describe himself ("Darkling I listen") once he has flown, "on the viewless wings of Poesy," into the "embalmed darkness" of the singing bird. To make this flight, he has had to free his night vision, so to speak--the sight operative in dreams--from the paradoxically obscuring light of reason, from "the dull brain that perplexes and retards." In a sense, he has had to fall asleep. His sleep, however, is not sound. For as Archibald MacLeish explains in his excellent reading of Keats, "There is still the bird singing and the listener listening--'thou' and 'I.' The song itself has not been taken, is not possessed: the longed-for beauty is not mine. And why? Because the listener's self, the listener's identity, is still between" (183). In order to lose himself completely within this

perfumed night, the poet must sink beyond the semi-conscious state into which he has been drawn by the hypnotic voice of nature--until at last the dark deepens into the dark of his own grave, wherein he finds himself become a "sod" (line 60).

Hidden within a dark that man can fully enter only by becoming a sod, in what sense is the nightingale also a sod? Hardy obliquely answers this question by grounding his thrush within a winter world of hard, cold facts. If it is impossible to lose self-consciousness without becoming simply one more fact, then that is what the thrush, "darkling" in that it lacks self-consciousness, finally seems to be. Illustrative of Hardy's assertion (as quoted by Pinion in A Hardy Companion) that "it was thoughtless . . . to say 'What a lovely day!' when one remembered the suffering caused by winter weather to birds and animals" (182), the thrush itself, unconscious of its suffering, is no less thoughtless than a sod. Meanwhile the poet, through his reading of nature, his "thought on things," can discover no basis for the faith that seemingly informs the thrush's evensong, "a service of thanksgiving for the day" (as Brooks and Warren define it in Understanding Poetry) "and a prayer for protection and quiet repose through the night" (346). To the poet "little

cause for carolings . . . Was written on terrestrial things."

In "The Year's Awakening" (335), which casts light on the nature of that mysterious faith, much is written on celestial things. As the poet observes, interrogating a similar singing bird at dusk,

How do you know that the pilgrim track
 Along the belting zodiac
 Swept by the sun in his seeming rounds
 Is traced by now to the Fishes' bounds
 And into the Ram, when weeks of cloud
 Have wrapt the sky in a clammy shroud,
 And never as yet a tinct of spring
 Has shown in the Earth's apparelling;
 O vespering bird, how do you know,
 How do you know?

Incapable of the human being's "thought on things," the bird knows because it feels; its pulse (like that of the crocus root in the second stanza, deep within the sod) beats in "mystic sympathy" with the natural rhythm, as the youth in Shelley's Alastor yearned for his to do (line 652). This means of knowledge, unavailable to the thinking man, mystifies him.

Amid the cold, hard facts of an English winter, the poet in "The Darkling Thrush" can discern no evidence of the coming spring (as can the poet in "The Year's Awakening," set somewhat later in the season). And yet, like the "vespering bird," the thrush seems intuitively aware of the hidden restorative power of nature, for both songs (which are identical) ask the same rhetorical question: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" For the thrush, this certainty inspires "illimited" joy, the same "joy" that Coleridge defines in his "Dejection" Ode as "the spirit and the power, / Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower / A new Earth and new Heaven" (lines 67-9). And yet, by grounding the thrush and, through the physical presence of the bird, denying the speaker of the poem a Romantic vision of transcendence, Hardy reveals this new earth and heaven to be at most the springtime earth and heaven, whose transformation he records in "The Year's Awakening."

Following Wordsworth, who asserted that an "unsubstantial, faery place" was "fit home" for the cuckoo, Shelley (who makes the skylark a "Scorner of the ground") locates the lark "In the golden lightning / Of the sunken Sun," and Keats places the nightingale in a sensuous, yet rarefied "embalmed darkness," in order to suggest the

transcendent world that evanescent nature was in a state of becoming, to which a man won access through the "mystic sympathy" of his blood with the pulsations of the natural world. While Hardy's thrush suffers no loss through its expulsion from that Romantic fairyland, human beings fare otherwise when their renewal comes to depend on cyclical nature--as a digression, which looks at "Shelley's Skylark" (101) and "Transformations" (472), will illustrate.

In "Shelley's Skylark" (which appears with "The Darkling Thrush" in Poems of the Past and the Present) the bird was once "A little ball of feather and bone"; now dead, it is "A pinch of unseen, unguarded dust." Thus diminished by the deliberately grotesque physical description that Hardy applies to Shelley's "unbodied joy," the bird actually gains from the poet's speculation as to "where it wastes":

Maybe it rests in the loam I view,
 Maybe it throbs in a myrtle's green,
 Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue
 Of a grape on the slopes of yon inland scene.

Hardy's appeal to the "faeries" to "go and find / That tiny pinch of priceless dust" associates this new home of the skylark with the "faery place" of Wordsworth's cuckoo, the "faery lands forlorn" into whose "perilous seas" the

song of Keats's nightingale lures the Romantic voyager. And yet the fairyland of this dead lark is anything but preternatural. It is physical nature. Keats seems himself to have recognized that his "faery lands forlorn" consist of human graves--his "perilous seas" are Tennyson's "vast and wandering grave," the grave of all romanticists who abandon hearth and home. The fairyland in which Hardy places--buries--Shelley's skylark also consists of graves: loam, myrtles, grapes. In its grave the skylark has continued to participate in the natural cycle--and no less unself-consciously than it did when it could "fling his soul" (as does the darkling thrush) "Upon the growing gloom." The loss of its soul, its voice, costs it nothing in self-awareness.

Human beings, however, define themselves by self-consciously defying the natural cycle, by freeing a moment from it--for example, by inurning the remains of the skylark in a jeweled box. By rescuing the bird from the processes of nature--"For it inspired a bard to win / Ecstatic heights in thought and rhyme"--Hardy makes it an ironical analogue to Shelley's poem--ironical in that Shelley resisted the very "thought" for which Hardy honors him. Shelley's climactic realization was that, in contrast to unself-conscious birdsong, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." Even if society could free

itself from those unnatural characteristics, "Hate and pride and fear," still that ineluctable human characteristic, thought--because it denies to human beings the unself-consciousness of an instinctual existence--would render the skylark's joy inaccessible to man: "I know not how thy joy we ever should come near." This apparent clear-sightedness, which Hardy celebrates, thus explains why Shelley, even as he aspires idealistically to the skylark's ecstasy, pleads for but "half the gladness / That thy brain must know" (lines 90-102). In contrast, the poet in "The Darkling Thrush," while similarly mystified by a joyous bird, refrains from making even this modest appeal, as if he suspects that even half that "gladness" would cost more in human self-awareness than Shelley could anticipate.

The transformation undergone by Shelley's skylark sees people changed, in Hardy's "Transformations," into things-- a yew, grasses, a rose. This later poem, from Moments of Vision, deals nostalgically with people of "long ago"--of pre-Darwinian times--who have apparently paid no price at all for their change. As forms of vegetation,

. . . they feel the sun and rain,
 And the energy again
 That made them what they were!

Irony attends that final "were." These elements, the sun and the rain, make them what they are, now that they belong to "a simmer of rot and renewal" (as Robert Lowell phrases it in "Eye and Tooth" [108]). If "the sun and rain . . . made them what they were," then they played no greater role than they do now in harnessing that "energy"--which is the only meaningful response mankind can make to an indifferent and often apparently hostile universe. These were people whose appreciation of nature was thoroughly sensuous, and it remains so now that the elements have transfigured them and they feel with the "nerves" of plants.

Only to feel, and not to think on things, is (in "Afternoon Service at Mellstock") to sway "like the trees"--or (in "Transformations") to vegetate as the dead do in their graves. Only a thoughtless youth (or an illiterate bird) can ask hopefully, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Consider the old woman who talks to herself (referring sometimes to herself as "one") in "Autumn in King's Hintock Park" (215):

Here by the baring bough
 Raking up leaves,
 Often I ponder how
 Springtime deceives,--
 I, an old woman now,
 Raking up leaves.

Here in the avenue
Raking up leaves,
Lords' ladies pass in view,
Until one heaves
Sighs at life's russet hue,
Raking up leaves!

The falling leaves tell eloquently of spring's broken promise. She was once as "fresh and free" as these young ladies--her youth a "springtime" even in autumn, when she, too, observed old women raking up leaves. She imagined then, as she assumes these ladies must be doing now, that her own "springtime" would last forever. Her thoughtless youth seemed to promise eternal youth. But human beings, she sighs now in realization, know but one springtime. The example of nature--along with the romantic tendency of human beings to think of themselves as natural men and women--leads to the youthful delusion that autumn will never come without a corresponding spring. The mature person resists this tempting parallel between his life and the annual renewal of nature. Human beings die, and earth not only never grieves for them, but also never grieves for its own "russet hue"; for earth, unlike a human life, is self-renewing. The attempt of this old woman, by raking up leaves, to redesign her environs is, while modest, uniquely human.

Refashioning nature--this is what "all mankind" are doing, in "The Darkling Thrush," by tending "their household fires." Rather than look to nature for a metaphor for psychical regeneration, as does the "fervourless" poet, these others have created for themselves a sort of spring indoors.

The poet's nostalgic "return" to nature leaves him desolate. Thoughts have separated him from nature, for which he still has Romantic feelings--feelings that the scientific humanist reserves for his fellows. In solitude the poet stands with his back to scenes of fellowship, where household fires are dancing--as, perhaps, are men and women to a "happy good-night air"--scenes that are the springs of human joy. While ignoring altogether the household fires, he sentimentally credits the thrush with a distinctively human "air" and half-believes

. . . there trembled through
 His happy good-night air
 Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
 And I was unaware.

A benediction may indeed pass through a goodnight air, but not through such a one as any bird can sing. Bayley cites that song as an example of Hardy's "tendency" to

place "metaphor and description in apposition, so that each ignores the other instead of complementing it." He writes,

The metaphors are now of religion, of joys and consolations; and we recognise that the poem itself, like not a few of Hardy's, has come to suggest the progression and cadence of a hymn. But the blessed hope appropriate to a hymn is in complete obliviousness of such a song as the bird is singing--its 'happy goodnight air' . . . Such an 'air' is quite inapposite to 'blessed hopes' of the religious sort, as would be the airs of 'Haste to the Wedding' or 'The Soldier's Joy,' lively fiddle tunes which the youthful Hardy had played at dances (38)

But surely the hymns and the fiddle tunes do complement each other--and in a literal sense. As Hardy the antiquarian knows, "It was customary" (with choirs like the Mellstock Quire in Under the Greenwood Tree) "to inscribe," in addition to hymns, "a few jigs, reels, hornpipes, and ballads in the same book, by beginning it at the other end, the insertions being continued from front and back till sacred and secular met together in the middle" ("Preface," Under the Greenwood Tree). During Sunday service, these choirs played hymns from the same copybooks from which, at

the Saturday-night dance a few hours earlier, they had played goodnight airs. These airs in fact, rather than the hymns, so appealed to the youthful Hardy's religious sense, his "ecstatic temperament," that dancing seems to have become for him, when he was no more than four, an almost mystical experience. In his autobiography he tells of dancing "a pas seul in the middle of the room" to "the endless jigs, hornpipes, reels, waltzes, and country-dances that his father played of an evening" (Life 19).

"The Self-Unseeing" (166), a very knowing little poem also from Poems of the Past and the Present, recreates that scene. While the poet of "The Darkling Thrush" stays ignorant of the possibility that such a tune to which folk dance may offer consolations of which the thrush is "unaware," the adult who speaks "The Self-Unseeing" knows full well that blessings of a transcendent quality inhere in a social setting where hearthfires as well as people dance to goodnight airs. In "The Self-Unseeing" the drama is quintessentially domestic: there is a hearthfire, in front of which the mother is sitting; standing nearby, the father is playing his fiddle. The fire, as well as the dancing child, is under the spell of the music, doubtless a "happy good-night air":

She sat there in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;

He who played stood there,
Bowling it higher and higher.

Childlike, I danced in a dream;
Blessings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!

It was the music, with its inducement of fellowship, that was responsible for the preternatural quality of the scene. The blessings that emblazoned the day trembled through that "air," which inspired the fiery dance that gave the music its golden cast. Just as the blessings shone on everyone, so did the boy's dance involve them all.

Meanwhile, "we"--the whole family--"were looking away," as was the whole congregation in "Afternoon Service at Mellstock," another of Hardy's recollections of childhood--seeking benediction outside the circle of human fellowship. It was not the unself-conscious child alone who was ignorant of the sanctity of that quintessentially human drama. His parents shared the ignorance. Their adulthood, in contrast to that of the knowing adult who now speaks the poem, was something of a childhood--a childhood, such as Wordsworth describes in the Immortality "Ode," when it appeared that "celestial light," and not assuredly the

golden glow of a household fire, "apparelled" nature (line 4).

Hardy's little poem poses a two-count challenge to Wordsworth's recollection of childhood. First, Hardy implies that the characteristic unself-consciousness of the child precluded his awareness at the time of any such blessedness, any such "glory," whatever its source. And as to its source, Hardy insists that this apparently "celestial" light emanated from the domestic hearth--from the roots of the cosmic tree and not from its crown. The glow of this fire clothed nature. Perhaps it even spread to a celestial height, for it is the capacity of human beings to create order out of the chaos of their immediate surroundings that enables them to conceive, and thus to effect, a similar transformation of the universe. A network of household fires, rather than hellfires, amid the roots of the cosmic tree is mirrored by its constellated crown, the tamed star-fire. Not nature, as Wordsworth supposed, or the transcendent realm to which it supposedly led, but human fellowship teaches "Deeply the lesson deep of love" (The Excursion I.194-5).

If only this realization struck the poet of "The Darkling Thrush," whom Hardy keeps in the dark! Bayley would argue, perhaps, that it would do him no good. For, as Bayley asserts in reference to the poet's recognition of

the golden moment in "The Self-Unseeing," "no one knew it as a moment of blessing; the awareness comes years after, when, Hardy implies, it is no 'use'" (35). But surely that awareness would be of no less use to the speaker of that poem than to the enervated romanticist who leans upon a coppice gate and listens wistfully to an old thrush. Surely it is not too late for him to head for home, where his own household fire, though dying out, may not as yet be dead.

III

What does happen when the poet, later that evening, goes indoors? Perhaps "A Commonplace Day" (115), another of the Poems of the Past and the Present, provides the answer. At least it is instructive to read this poem, even though it comes earlier in the volume, as a pendant to "The Darkling Thrush." The household fire has died down; its no longer purposeful flames are merely fitful, "busy." The poet thus rakes down the fire to start a new one³:

³Since Hardy never says that it is for this purpose of building a new fire that the poet "spoils the busy flames," it may be simply the poet's regret, over wasting the day, that later flares up in the dark. Very likely, though, Hardy discloses the outer action, the rekindling of the fire, by revealing--in a highly sophisticated, modern way--through parallel imagery, its inner, psychological effect upon the speaker of the poem.

I part the fire-gnawed logs,
Rake forth the embers, spoil the busy flames,
and lay the ends
Upon the shining dogs;

and as he does so, the room, temporarily without firelight,
darkens:

Further and further from the nooks the twilight's
stride extends,
And beamless black impends.

Now "nooks," used here to signify the corners of the room, can also mean those secluded outdoor spots, those copses, favored by romanticists in their communion with nature. The room awhile in darkness, the out-of-doors seems to be inside. The shadows that lurk in isolated corners of a gloomy landscape got a foot inside the door during the poet's inattention to his hearth. As night comes on and the twilight strides from the nooks outside, so, as the firelight dies, does it step frankly from the corners of the room. Without the firelight, the house might almost be without walls, open to the cold.

That "beamless black impends" reinforces the notion that the darkness indoors is identical to the darkness outside by hinting that without a hearthfire, the house might as well be roofless too. Of course, "beamless black"

describes a dark unpenetrated by even a single beam of light. But if it is this "black" that "impends"--that is imminent--there is also a ceiling-less dark that overhangs; for "beamless black" (since "beam" has the root meaning of "tree") may also conjure up a rooftree-less dark, a house not only exposed to the night on all four sides but also open to the sky--which is no house at all.

By lighting a fire a man transforms the bitter cold of midwinter into the warmth of spring. In what sense does this act also put a roof over his head? Hardy's image of an overhanging "beamless black" may yield, in addition to its negative (a ceiling whose exposed beams are lit by firelight), the picture of a ceiling whose rooftree and crossbeams are extensions of the beams of light themselves, emanating from the hearth. Such a ceiling brings to mind, in much the same way as does the network of Fawkes fires in The Return of the Native, a stylized night sky full of constellations. Certainly the sketched-out sky is something of a roof. The spark that ignites a household fire is thus the spore, the seed, that produces a cosmic tree whose "beams" connect the stars with each other and so order the universe: Yggdrasil, to which Swinburne (a favorite of Hardy) alludes in "Hertha," a tree with fire in its "heart" (line 143) and stars in its branches (108). Lighting a fire may not itself put a roof over a man's

head, but without a hearthfire on such a dreary night as this, he might as well be outdoors as indoors.

Just as the out-of-doors has been in, nature, "the Sleep-Worker" (as Hardy calls it elsewhere), has been inside the man. Whoever ignores his household fire, as this man seems to have been doing, ignores his own humanity. In effect, he imitates nature, which Hardy represents in "The Sleep-Worker" as ignorant of mankind, asleep to its tribulations (121). Thus, as the newly laid fire in "A Commonplace Day" begins to blaze, the speaker himself awakens. The day, which was almost stillborn--he refers to its "pale corpse-like birth" (a figure of speech that echoes the "Century's corpse" of "The Darkling Thrush," itself the echo of an elaborate trope in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind")--is now being sealed in its casket. The fire is not reviving it. But the poet, who has let this "Dullest of dull-hued Days" cast a pall over his own potential creativity--who has himself, in short, personified this day--does come to life. The realization dawns that what has happened to him this day may have occurred elsewhere to someone of less "commonplace genius." His "regret" over his failure to salvage this wan day awakens as the fire grows; the death of the old day makes this new "day" seem even brighter.

Hardy speculates that "momentary chance or wile" may have "benumbed at birth," as did the gloomy cold, the "enkindling ardency from whose maturer glows / The World's amendment flows." This hypothesis accords with his modern conception of a universe whose only discernible design is manmade. It would be highly imprudent, therefore, to rely on nature--on the wind, for example, which romanticists equate with divine inspiration--to spread the sparks of this revolutionary fire, as Shelley does at the end of his "Ode to the West Wind." A wildfire, symbol of discordant sterile sexuality, may well result. There is something onanistic as well as promiscuous to sowing these seeds, these sparks, in the wind. Of course, the fire may just as easily go out.

The phrase "benumbed at birth" picks up his earlier reference to "the pale corpse-like birth / Of this diurnal unit"--a day compared with a nearly stillborn infant. Visually this corpse-like day appears identical to the landscape of "The Darkling Thrush." Yet what has been "benumbed at birth" is not the landscape as it came to birth--as it became grayly visible at dawn--but rather the "enkindling ardency," embodied in the poem by the hearthfire. By mixing his metaphors, Hardy compares the fire not only with the day (hardly an audacious comparison) but also with a newborn infant--as if the spark that sets

the fire burning were human seed as well as the seed from which there grows the tree whose branches roof the world. Stoking the hearthfire is therefore analogous to nurturing an infant as well as a tree. Significantly those characters in Hardy's novels who abandon the land or yield to their animal passions disrupt communal life or betray their mates and die childless.

The poem leaves off with the poet's regret over the passing of yet another day of missed opportunities. In the course of building the fire he has come to recognize, through the symbolism that art and literature attach to fire, that the possible amelioration of human ills begins, perhaps literally, at the fireside. After all, charity--to Hardy's mind the highest of human virtues--does begin at home. Still, there is no indication that the speaker of this poem has now committed himself to a course of action that will reduce the "pain" of "the human and kindred animal races"--which Hardy (in the "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier) declares is the aim of his scientific humanism. As in "The Darkling Thrush," the poet possesses sufficient scientific knowledge to be able to take "a full look at the Worst." What this solitary individual lacks is an immediate object of loving-kindness that will bridge the distance between himself and abstract suffering humanity,

whose "futurity" remains in doubt, owing to the stymied "impulse" or "intent" of a potential savior.

The solitude of the poet in "A Commonplace Day" (as also in "The Darkling Thrush") may well reflect Hardy's own estrangement from his first wife, Emma. Like a fire, their love brightened the Cornwall of their courting days. It is the fire of that love--the "old flame" of the Virgilian epigraph to the elegiac "Poems of 1912-13"--that Hardy and Emma, after their marriage, allowed to burn not out of control but simply out.

That epigraph, Veteris vestigia flammae, to a sequence of poems that tell of the courtship as well as of Emma's death implies that the poems are themselves relics of the old fire of their love. Hardy's love for Emma and hers for him had given radiant order to the landscape of their courtship--a terrain outside and inside themselves. It was a radiance obscured for almost forty years by the gloom enshrouding Max Gate, their Dorset home. The "Poems of 1912-13" scaffold that bright terrain, enshrining it.

A harmonious human drama--whether it involves tending a household fire, dancing, or "homemaking"--colors the landscape. No doubt the awesome Cornish seascape lent something of its own to the drama of Hardy and Emma when they first met there. According to Robert Gittings, "there

is no doubt that this strange coast, with its booming artillery of waves, its edge-of-the-world atmosphere, and the great sweeping lighthouse eyes of Hartland Point and Trevoze Head, themselves like legendary Cornish giants, caught them up in a mood of poetic romance" (Young Thomas Hardy 135). "Beeny Cliff" (351) testifies vividly to Hardy's aesthetic appreciation of the setting:

I

O the opal and the sapphire of that wandering
 western sea,
 And the woman riding high above with bright hair
 flapping free--
 The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved
 me.

II

The pale mews plained below us, and the waves
 seemed far away
 In a nether sky, engrossed in saying their
 ceaseless babbling say,
 As we laughed light-heartedly aloft on that
 clear-sunned March day.

III

A little cloud then cloaked us, and there flew an
 irised rain,

And the Atlantic dyed its levels with a dull
 misfeatured stain,
 And then the sun burst out again, and purples
 prinked the main.

Donald Davie, in "Hardy's Virgilian Purples," pulls from Hardy's novel of Cornwall (A Pair of Blue Eyes) a similar description of Beeny, which indicates that--in Davie's words--"the purple of Beeny Cliff" is not only "a visual effect" but also a "spiritual" one: "the purples which prink the main," he concludes, ". . . are the spiritual light of sexual love" (140). By tracing "the purple light" of A Pair of Blue Eyes--the quotation marks are Hardy's--to the "lumine vestit purpureo" of Book VI of The Aeneid (a purple that Davie describes as "preternatural through and through, the light of an alternate cosmos lit by another sun by day and other stars by night"), he argues that "it is this light . . . that Hardy, agnostic and scientific humanist, claimed to see from Beeny Cliff when 'purples prinked the main'" (144). It appears that the physical terrain of Beeny Cliff is but a transparency overlying an "unsubstantial, faery place" (as Wordsworth puts it, romanticizing nature in "To a Cuckoo") whose splendor glimmers through it.

On the contrary, while the setting did heighten Hardy's romantic feelings towards Emma, surely it was his

own psychological terrain that shone with "the spiritual light of sexual love," the fire of the Latin epigraph (also from The Aeneid), and this light projected onto the physical terrain. In "At Castle Boterel" (351) where Hardy recalls an incident during his courtship that occurred on the spot he now, forty years later, is visiting, it was not the scenery--though impressive--that gave "colour and cast" to the human drama but exactly the opposite:

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
 And much have they faced there, first and
 last,
 Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
 But what they record in colour and cast
 Is--that we two passed.

And what "colour" did the human drama throw onto the landscape if not that Virgilian purple, which is not, after all, really a purple but signifies rather "the brightest, most vivid colouring in general, not of that peculiar tint so called"? (I quote Davie who is himself quoting Warburton's gloss on Pope's use of "purple" in the Latin sense [141].)

Hardy recalls in the poem how he and Emma one night had gotten out of their chaise--"To ease the sturdy pony's load / When he sighed and slowed"--and climbed the hill on

foot. In this, the second stanza Hardy rhymes "benighted," which describes himself and Emma at that twilight hour, with "alighted," which specifies their action. Later in the poem, in the penultimate stanza, he reiterates this rhyme, asserting that

. . . to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,
 In mindless rote, has ruled from sight
 The substance now, one phantom figure
 Remains on the slope, as when that night
 Saw us alight.

Surely Hardy is playing on "alight": "night," through its association with darkness, naturally calls attention to the "light" in "alight," which thus becomes a pun, meaning "aglow" or even "aflame"--that night saw us aflame with sexual love.

Hardy also seems to be saying that since the flesh and bone no longer remain, there is but a "phantom figure" whose appearance is of light. "After a Journey" (another poem in the series [349]) reveals this radiant apparition to be a personification of Hardy's own revived passion for Emma, a vestige of his old flame. The drama of their romance, which transpired here, is still illuminating the otherwise dusky landscape.

When Hardy returns to Cornwall, he apprehends not the splendor of Virgil's "alternate cosmos" but rather, as recorded in "After a Journey," the "rose-flush" of Emma herself (349). Interestingly, this poem, like a dream-vision, takes place late at night--a fact that becomes clear only in the final stanza when Hardy, addressing Emma, concedes, "Soon you will have, Dear, to vanish from me, / For the stars close their shutters and the dawn whitens hazily." Until now, colors (uncharacteristic of nighttime) have suffused the poem. And while the parti-colored "mist-bow" of the third stanza belongs to memory, Emma in the first stanza--"With [her] nut-coloured hair, / And gray eyes, and rose-flush coming and going"--belongs to the immediate present. Here she seems "all aglow," which in fact she no longer is, as Hardy specifically says in the third stanza. There she is "the thin ghost that I now frailly follow"--a characterization at odds with the ruddy Emma of the first stanza. Though frail, it is Hardy who is aflame with the fervor, the ardency of revived passion: "I am just the same as when / Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers," he asserts in the closing lines. The flame still dances within Hardy, and like a magic lantern it projects an image of Emma from "forty years ago" onto the scene of their courtship. Just as their romance gave meaning to that landscape forty years earlier, Hardy's

intense emotional reenactment of it now brightens the night, colorifies the dark terrain.

This drama is not entirely, however, a reenactment. While Emma does lead him on "To the spots we knew when we haunted here together," she also draws him "Up the cliff, down, till I'm lonely, lost"--in other words, to forgotten if not heretofore unvisited spots. The poem seems, then, more than mere reminiscence, a dream-vision. Only in a dream can Hardy and Emma now explore together these places as well as revisit those remembered ones. It is in dreams, after all, that nighttime becomes daytime, when a person, though asleep, does things as when awake--and can do them with someone who has died. This drama familiarizes psychological terrain, the dreamscape of Hardy's unconscious, which (thus brightened) appears as Cornwall. When "dawn whitens hazily," the dream fades, and Emma vanishes.

Just as Hardy imagines that the "painted" and "sculpted" hillside at Castle Boterel displays their love, so does Emma suppose, in "Under the Waterfall" (which immediately precedes the "Poems of 1912-13" in Satires of Circumstance), that "the purl of a little valley fall" tells the story of their love (335). In his autobiography Hardy quotes--from "Some Recollections," penned by Emma in

1911 (the year before her death)--this account of their courtship:

[O]ften we walked to Boscastle Harbour down the beautiful Vallency Valley where we had to jump over stones and climb over a low wall by rough steps, or get through a narrow pathway, to come out on great wide spaces suddenly, with a sparkling little brook going the same way, in which we once lost a tiny picnic-tumbler, and there it is to this day no doubt between two of the boulders. (Life 74)

In "Under the Waterfall," versified from this prose passage, a woman is also recalling the incident. Washing her hands in a "china-ware" basin has brought back to her the unsuccessful attempt by her and her lover (their arms in water up to their elbows) to retrieve from "a crease of the stone," under the waterfall, the "drinking-glass" from which the two picnickers had "sipped lovers' wine" together. Their communion with each other, mildly sexual in nature, seems to have had for her an archetypal authenticity, the once-in-a-lifetime manifestation of an ideal state, experience as pure poetry.

Why is it, a second voice interrupts the woman's tale to ask, that (as she has said)

. . . the only prime
And real love-rhyme
That I know by heart,
And that leaves no smart,
Is the purl of a little valley fall
About three spans wide and two spans tall
Over a table of solid rock,
And into a scoop of the self-same block;

"And why," the voice also asks, "does plunging your arms in
a bowl / Full of spring water, bring throbs to your soul?"
In answer to the second part of the question, the woman
explains,

The basin seems the pool, and its edge
The hard smooth face of the brook-side ledge,
And the leafy pattern of china-ware
The hanging plants that were bathing there.

The out-of-doors has thus been brought indoors and
domesticated by art. Similarly the lovers--artists
themselves, who had gone to this spot not only to picnic
but also "to paint the scene"--create a "rhyme" of the
"boiling voice" of nature.

Only at the end of the poem does the speaker reveal
that this "love-rhyme" is not entirely of the waterfall's
making:

By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
There lies intact that chalice of ours,
And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
Persistently sung by the fall above.

What does the chalice add if not a human voice? At the very least its presence facilitates a translation into the human tongue of the otherwise incomprehensible voice of the wilderness. The couple visited this spot not to commune with nature but to commune with each other. By so doing, they brought nature into communion with themselves. Now it is as if nature were continuously drinking from their cup, renewing its voice as it flows in and out of the chalice. It speaks as much of the chalice, symbol of the lovers' communion, as of the "abyss" that lodges the cup. Thus the voice is less "hollow" than the woman at first implies, when she declares, "With a hollow boiling voice it speaks / And has spoken since hills were turfless peaks."

Thus audibly does the waterfall testify to their love, as visually do the rocks at Castle Boterel. Whether or not the lovers literally painted the scene (as they meant to do), doubtless the "light" of their love (as in "At Castle Boterel") suffuses the scene. For the chalice, which embodies their love, works an analogous, artistic effect, transforming the place into a poem instead of a relief.

Nevertheless, while Hardy in "Under the Waterfall" stresses auditory rather than visual imagery, he does seem subtly to imply that the chalice may indeed have colored the scene. In the opening lines, when the woman plunges her arm "In a basin of water," "The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day" returns. The sensation emerges as if seen, rather than felt, "from its thickening shroud of gray," and it is as much a sound--"the purl of a little valley fall"--as a physically "sharp" sensation that the woman apprehends. Her intense, poetical feelings about this day translate into an audible rhyme, which has the color of those feelings--the "purple" splendor of "the spiritual light of sexual love." Perhaps the chalice--for these lovers a sort of holy grail--is working a miracle. This goblet, wherefrom their lips "sipped lovers' wine," may be transforming into that wine the water that fills and refills it, thus flooding the scene with "purples."

In "After a Journey" Hardy writes of his and Emma's marriage, "Summer gave us sweets, but autumn wrought division." Forty years thus collapse into one year, and the passing seasons--darkening towards winter like a "thickening shroud of gray"--become allegorical of the decline of their relationship. The allegory is particularly convenient since their courtship occurred in spring, their wedding in summer, and Emma's death in late

autumn, 27 November 1912. Those "Poems of 1912-13" which dramatize the revival of Hardy's first, intensely romantic feelings for this "West of Wessex Girl" and thus become themselves relics of that old fire also take place in spring--a not entirely allegorical spring, since Hardy revisited Cornwall in March of 1913, as he and Emma had planned to do together (Life 389). He was now courting Emma's ghost. If only he and Emma, in the autumn of their marriage, had returned to Cornwall for the splendor left behind and since obscured, they might have healed their divisions. Seemingly obsessed by this unrealized possibility, Hardy journeyed to Boscastle alone, as if unwilling to admit that it was too late for them to revive their ardency. In the poems he seems intent on recovering relics of the fire that colored that setting and--if it is too late to make a spring of their dismal autumn--to transform the allegorical winter of his own desolation into an allegorical spring that recalls their courting days. Success should enable him to take a spectral Emma back to Dorset, which their new romance might then "paint," "sculpt," and "rhyme." It should transform Max Gate, Davie's "landscape of treason," into a "landscape of love and loyalty" (147).

Thanks to a resurgence of feeling for Emma, Hardy did come away with a vision of her as she was forty years

earlier. Unfortunately those feelings seem to have confined themselves to the young woman of this springtime vision and not to have extended to the heavy, bull-necked mistress of Max Gate in autumn. Consequently, while Hardy's courtship of Emma's ghost in "After a Journey" reveals to him previously unknown sites in the vicinity of Boscastle, where he would be lost without her, the courtship has no similar effect on any other place. True, in "The Phantom Horsewoman" (353) Hardy does retain "far from that shore" (Cornwall) a vision of the young Emma on horseback; however, she is never riding elsewhere than "On that shagged and shaly / Atlantic spot"--never, in short, across the Dorset countryside. For Hardy it remained winter at Max Gate, a winter that his courtship of her ghost could not transform into spring.

This point is rammed home by "Where the Picnic Was" (357), one of three poems tagged onto the end of the original sequence (which had concluded with the superior "The Phantom Horsewoman") for Hardy's Collected Poems of 1919. "Where the Picnic Was" does seem out of place at the tail-end, since it takes place during the winter of 1912-13, before Hardy's March pilgrimage to Cornwall. But it adds perspective to the sequence as a whole, for it reinforces the desolation of Max Gate, which Hardy's buoyant description of the phantom horsewoman may have

seemed to dispel. Furthermore, the poem plays counterpoint to "Under the Waterfall," where Emma relives a different picnic in a far, romantic place--a recollection that her death in "The Going" (which introduces the "Poems of 1912-13") abruptly terminates.

In "Where the Picnic Was" Hardy, a solitary man--as alone as the speaker of "The Darkling Thrush"--finds himself outdoors in "winter mire." Yet while the speaker of "The Darkling Thrush" abandoned his household fire, the poet in this later poem is out in search of the remnants of a picnic fire of the previous summer, when he and Emma and two companions walked from Max Gate to Ridgeway on the Dorset coast (Bailey, The Poetry of Thomas Hardy 307). And in spite of the cold wind and gray grass,

. . . the spot still shows
 As a burnt circle--aye,
 And stick-ends, charred,
 Still strew the sward.

Upon discovering this "forsaken place," Hardy seems to feel an impulse to rekindle the fire, for he declares,

Yes I am here
 Just as last year,
 And the sea breathes brine
 From its strange straight line

Up hither, the same
As when we four came.

He seems briefly to imagine that this summertime fire belonged also to the "summer" that "gave them sweets" rather than to the allegorical autumn of their marriage. If it had, then the fire, as a vestige of the "fire" that had given "colour and cast" to the rocks at Castle Boterel, would (figuratively) have contributed as much of warmth and splendor to Max Gate and its environs as the summer sun itself. It would have colored this scene a "Virgilian purple." In that case, were Hardy now to rekindle the fire, he would be joining hands again with Emma in tending the fire of their love, which would consequently transform this bitter, late season into that sweet, early one.

But as in "A Commonplace Day," the impulse proves stillborn. This fire aroused no drama that ever made this landscape anything but dismal for the Hardys. Not even so rudimentary a form of homemaking as their picnic in "Under the Waterfall" saw passionate reenactment here. The placement of "Where the Picnic Was" at the end of the sequence suggests that Max Gate remains the same as when the desolation of Hardy's winter there prompted his return to the bright country of their springtime passion.

There are no picnics, Hardy declares at the end of "Where the Picnic Was," amid the "urban roar" where the two companions have gone who accompanied him and Emma that day. Is there, then, no homemaking there? When it comes to humanizing your surroundings, might you as well be a part of nature, like Emma in her grave, as apart from nature, which urbanites often feel themselves to be? And yet, of course, no environment testifies any more vividly than an urban one to the success of human hands at refashioning nature. Set in the ancient port city of Emma's native Plymouth, "During Wind and Rain" (495) obliquely records the gradual collapse of homemaking in the city. In contrast, "Molly Gone" (497), set in Dorset, reveals how two people can humanize a place and with what transcendent results.

As Dennis Taylor points out in a brilliant reading of "During Wind and Rain," the poem is the reverie of a man staring at the names on the tombstones in a family plot and thinking, while a storm approaches, about the life of this family, the Giffords, in Plymouth. At the end of each stanza (as Taylor notes) a line prepares for the vignette to follow and at the same time expresses the poet's startled realization that he is himself not there with them but rather in a graveyard where a storm is imminent (Taylor 31-2). The "sick leaves," the "storm-birds," the "rotten

rose"--like the "carved names"--all belong to the graveyard setting, even as they inspire corresponding images in the poet's vision of domestic life. His daydream of harmonious family life, even as it is becoming excessively carefree, makes him oblivious, off and on, to the approaching storm, just as the ease with which the family gains apparent control of its physical environment encourages the pursuit of irrelevant social goals. Right as the family is moving up the social ladder and into "a high new house," the illusion bursts, and rain begins to drench the "brightest things that are theirs," which have been unloaded at the new address.

How have they set about domesticating their surroundings? In the first stanza (set at night) their voices blend in song, broadcasting harmonies throughout nature, while candlelight (a human counterpart to starlight and moonlight) tames the dark. It is no natural light that brightens each countenance but rather a light of their own making:

They sing their dearest songs--
 He, she, all of them--yea,
 Treble and tenor and bass,
 And one to play;
 With the candles mooning each face. . . .

Perhaps homemaking, the domestication of nature, ends here. Evidence of a storm's approach--the flying leaves--jolts the poet from that comforting daydream. "Ah, no," insists the refrain, this stylized scene represents at best a temporary, personal transcendence of nature:

Ah, no; the years O!

How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

In the second stanza everyone in effect is sweeping them up. Here this "commonwealth of hearts and hands" is surrounding nature, giving it a human look, by transforming the chaos of "sick leaves" into a healthy garden. In the previous stanza the family domesticates the dark; here they tame the harsh sun:

They clear the creeping moss--

Elders and juniors--aye,

Making the pathways neat

And the garden gay;

And they build a shady seat. . . .

The refrain--"See, the white storm-birds wing across!"--implies that these two generations may have exercised their dominion over the earth, but as for the heavens . . .

Well, their dominion over the earth did extend into the heavens after all, even, in a way, over the storm-

birds, which have become pets. Also, here in the fourth stanza, the family enjoys the shady garden seat, eating there in summer:

They are blithely breakfasting all--
Men and maidens--yea,
Under the summer tree,
 With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee. . . .

But in their enjoyment of their transformed, harmonious surroundings, they have grown complacent; they have ceased to act. In this stanza, for the first time, they are doing nothing creative. Here they are relaxed, self-indulgently partaking of the fruits of the labors, "blithely breakfasting" as if on the morning after a day of intensive gardening. In fact, it is many mornings after; the garden, with its "rotten rose" (which belongs as much to their landscaped vista as to the poet's graveyard), has for a long time suffered neglect. The refrain--"And the rotten rose is ript from the wall"--signals the end of their effective homemaking. The rottenness of this flower tells, moreover, of the decay of the love that binds families together. By neglecting the garden, this family has ceased to be a commonwealth of hands; it has similarly ceased to be one of hearts. As Thom Gunn has surmised in an

otherwise bizarre reading, "Whatever is happening, . . . the harmony is only apparent, and the family is in some way ended" (19-46).

The concluding stanza functions as an envoi. In the face of an approaching storm (one that proves real as well as metaphorical), the family blithely pursues vain social goals, moving to "a high new house." Just as Eustacia (in The Return of the Native) mistakenly thinks she can escape the heath by moving to Budmouth or Paris, these individuals seem to be moving in part to avoid contending with the storm, whose wind is devastating their garden. A storm forces even socially ambitious families into the role of humble folk, battling the elements. Ironically, just when they think they have, in a manner of speaking, escaped the country for good, by attaining social rank, the first fat raindrop falls. The family's pursuit of social aims has not taken them, after all, away from the battlefield where every man, since the dawn of civilization, has had to face the elements and his own mortality. Here their "brightest things," symbols of their arrival, fade into their tombstones and come to symbolize their failure--a failure owing in part to the delusive glitter of urban life--to transcend nature:

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them--aye,

Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And the brightest things that are theirs. . . .
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

In contrast to "During Wind and Rain" (set in town), "Molly Gone," a pastoral elegy for Mary Hardy, documents the sustained, practical homemaking that Hardy and his sister undertook in rural Dorset. Never does nature appear more inhospitable than in wintertime, when Hardy speaks the poem; and now with Molly gone, the poet (who recalls their summer) feels himself imprisoned by the world over which they once, together, exercised dominion. The Dorset "coasts" are "now my prison close-barred"--it is as if he were frozen within the "hard" water (497).

The three middle stanzas tell how the poet and Molly exercised their dominion over nature. They gardened--they trained a "clambering rose" (symbolic of their love), which now seems to plead to no avail for Molly's approval, her "commendment," for swinging "gaily." Together they so tamed nature that it seems to look to man for positive reinforcement. Hardy and his sister explored the Dorset countryside, as he and Emma had done in Cornwall. By naming, in the third stanza, the scenes of his and Molly's

"jauntings," he maps--organizes--the countryside both for the reader and again for himself.

The crucial fourth stanza focuses on song, which to Hardy is as important and primitive an art as dance. (As Wendell Berry puts it, "The dance and the song / call each other into being" [261].) Here Hardy relates how the domesticity of candlelight familiarized even the dark outdoors: "past the porch-quoin / The rays would spring out on the laurels." The accord within the house extended outwards, into the insect-filled night. The candlelight drew the bumblebees, the "dumbledores," which "hit on the pane." It seems to the poet that they were equally attracted by Molly's singing as by the candlelight. They seemed to wish "to join" in the domestic scene. Nature moved to a human accompaniment.

In what sense, if any, were the heavens also moving to that harmony? The poem does close with a cosmic image. The poet asks, "Where, then, is Molly, who's no more with me?" and a star signals the answer (498). Wherever she now abides, she is also watching the star: "her glance is regarding its face from her home, so that there / Her eyes may have meetings with mine." It seems that, while Molly has not herself become a star (as human spirits do in pastoral elegies), she does abide "where the Eternal are,"

and this star, like the soul of Shelley's Adonais, "beacons" from that "abode" ("Adonais," line 495).

Like the musical note that the lovers in "To Meet, or Otherwise" contribute (as will be seen) to a man-made, universal order simply by meeting, this star, the visual equivalent of that harmonious "sound," suggests her contribution to an immortal order through her and her brother's humanizing effect upon their locality. The work of love transcends its physical setting. No doubt this realization alters the poet's assessment of his predicament, and the frozen coasts no longer seem his prison.

Perhaps unfortunately, no self-liberating gesture analogous to the uniquely human activities of gardening, of naming places, of singing is forthcoming from the poet-- unless, that is, "Logs on the Hearth" (another "memory of a sister") can serve as a pendant to "Molly Gone," in which case the "sign" tossed by the star prompts the poet to go indoors and lay a fire. In "Logs on the Hearth" (490), this act puts the poet in touch with his sister, whose memory has inspired the fire, as Hardy implies with his choice of fuel: the log of an apple tree (traditionally the tree of knowledge of good and evil, a version of the yet more venerable cosmic tree), which Hardy and Mary once climbed, picked apples from, pruned, and finally felled.

By burning it, the poet creates a new earth, if not a new heaven: no doubt the genial warmth melts the bars of what he calls his "prison-world" in "Molly Gone," while here it thaws the equally "chilly grave" of his sister. Her fervor somewhat revived,

My fellow-climber rises dim

From her chilly grave--

Just as she was, her foot near mine on the bending
limb,

Laughing, her young brown hand away.

They are together climbing again a tree that is now aflame. It is easy to visualize these two, her hand outstretched to him, as a couple dancing hand-in-hand around a fire, which--contained--spreads, paradoxically, from this domestic hearth into the cosmos. It may be that the star in "Molly Gone"--a star amid the branches of the cosmic tree--is the reflection of this household fire, a domesticated hellfire in the roots.

Fundamentally the conflict between man and nature (whose true face is its wintry aspect) is the story of two lovers making a home out of wilderness. "Molly Gone," together with "Logs on the Hearth," tells such a story. While Hardy and his sister were not lovers as such, he does "bracket" her, in the poem "Conjecture," as Gittings

observes, "with his two wives, as if he had been married to her too." Gittings justly describes "Molly Gone" as being "as poignant as any other of the love-poems" (Young Thomas Hardy 221).

Max Gate ought to have been for Hardy and Emma the site of the same elaborate homemaking as the poet and his sister undertake in "Molly Gone." In contrast to Hardy and Emma's Max Gate, the ideal house, as Wendell Berry envisions it, is one that "Love has visualized . . . and out of its expenditure / fleshed the design." Hardy would concur, as "Molly Gone" implies, that "croplands, gardens, / are of its architecture, // labor its realization" (29-35). Max Gate, of course, never bore the "likeness" of Hardy and Emma's love. After only a year of marriage, when the couple began to see Dorset as a place to settle in and consequently stayed a year at Bournemouth on the coast, a "thickening shroud of gray" (as Hardy describes the phenomenon in "Under the Waterfall") was already enveloping their relationship. In "We Sat at the Window" (428), set at this time, the couple stares out a window at the pouring rain, instead of gazing at each other. Thus they surrender their relationship to the foul weather, to the discord of the storm. "To Meet, or Otherwise" records the braving of just such an enshrouding gloom by the elderly Hardy, whose

"fragile frame" Time "shakes" (as in "I Look into My Glass") "With throbbings of noontide" (81), in order to meet his beloved--not Emma, but Florence Emily Dugdale, who became his second wife.

"To Meet, or Otherwise," which (with "Under the Waterfall" and the "Poems of 1912-13") appears in Satires of Circumstance, proclaims Hardy's resolve to embark on this late courtship (310). Inexplicably--unless because of the unpromising title--this fine poem has failed to attract anthologists. Matters of taste and critical judgment aside, it is as Hardy himself regarded it: a representative poem. In a letter to Edward Thomas, who had chosen two of Hardy's poems for an anthology, Hardy complains about the choice and recommends "To Meet, or Otherwise" as well illustrating his "idiosyncrasy" as a writer (Letters 5.87). A heart-felt love poem of cosmic dimensions, "To Meet, or Otherwise"--rather more trenchantly than the "slightly-built romance" Two on a Tower--realizes Hardy's stated "wish," in that novel, "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" (Personal Writings 16). In the poem Hardy suggests the "infinitesimal" nature of the life of the

lovers by limiting their "emotional history" to the "briefest" of meetings--which then itself attains cosmic magnitude. Their emotional history survives through the "note" that their meeting strikes within the music of the spheres.

The mood of the opening stanza swings from one emotional extreme to the other, as the poet first, like a love-sick adolescent, exaggerates the possible consequences, to the romance, of his decision to meet or not to meet his sweetheart. He then dramatically denies the importance of the decision by juxtaposing the rendezvous with their grave sites, which seem to Hardy to signify the all-devouring dark of personal extinction:

Whether to sally and see thee, girl of my dreams,
 Or whether to stay
 And see thee not! How vast the difference seems
 Of Yea from Nay
 Just now. Yet this same sun will slant its beams
 At no far day
 On our two mounds, and then what will the difference
 weigh!

In an early poem, "A Sign-Seeker," Hardy weighs the evidence for and against an afterlife and tentatively concludes, "When a man falls he lies" (50) Earlier still,

Tennyson assessed (in In Memoriam 35) the effect on love of this possibility--that "The cheeks drop in; the body bows; / Man dies; nor is there hope in dust"--and concluded,

If Death were seen
 At first as Death, Love had not been
 Or been in narrowest working shut,
 Mere fellowship of sluggish moods,
 Or in his coarsest Satyr-shape
 Had bruised the herb and crush'd the grape,
 And bask'd and batten'd in the woods.

Hardy implies in "To Meet, or Otherwise" that this unhappy inference is exactly the one that those gods or demons who keep man in the dark as to "some path or plan" want him to draw. Love, Hardy insists, is man's one sure means of rebellion against those inscrutable personifications of the unstable elements.

At the same time, Hardy continues hopefully to "scan" around this "brake Cimmerian"--his metaphor here for the treacherous physical and psychological setting of the human story--"for some path or plan." Meanwhile, the human drama will be blazing a trail of its own through that dark wilderness. Thus his resolve to act upon those ardent feelings of fellowship that for Hardy constitute true religion:

Yet I will see thee, maiden dear, and make
 The most I can
 Of what remains to us amid this brake
 Cimmerian
 Through which we grope, and from whose thorns we
 ache,
 While still we scan
 Round our frail faltering progress for some path or
 plan.

When, at the beginning of the third stanza, Hardy asserts, "By briefest meeting something sure is won," he reduces the emotional history of a couple to its quintessence--the quintessence of courtship, as Hardy describes it in the "Poems of 1912-13" and in "Under the Waterfall," and of homemaking as it appears in the first three stanzas of "During Wind and Rain" and in "Molly Gone." And there is no question but that this meeting promises to spark a household fire, for it expresses the same rage for order as does the lighting of the bonfires in The Return of the Native. There Hardy asserts,

to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded through Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against

the fiat that this recurrent season shall bring
 foul times, cold darkness, misery and death.
 Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the
 earth say, Let there be light. (1.3)

A similar curfew seems to forbid the meeting of lovers
 (Hardy's "gods of the earth"). The possibility that death
 means personal extinction decrees that love not be. To
 meet in love, in "human tenderness" (as Hardy puts it in
 the final stanza)--and not in a "fellowship of sluggish
 moods" or in a sybaritic orgy, which would complement the
 chaos from the absence of some path or plan--is thus to
 break the curfew, to venture defiantly hand in hand into
 the brake. For these lovers, it is a brave first step, but
 only that, towards possible freedom:

By briefest meeting something sure is won;

It will have been:

Nor God nor Demon can undo the done,

Unseen the seen,

Make muted music be as unbegun,

Though things terrene

Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.

This briefest of meetings amid a Cimmerian brake calls
 music into being. This couple's rendezvous is the first
 step in a dance in which (as in "The Night of the Dance")

"She will return in Love's low tongue / [His] vows as [they] wheel around" (232). It is also the first step in a dance that transcends time and space--a dance such as the heathfolk, in The Return of the Native, execute around the fire. The lighting of that fire (a form of hearthfire, a domestication of the hellfire amid the roots of the cosmic tree) links the heathfolk with the barbarians of long ago who preceded them on Rainbarrow, the prehistoric burial mound and site of their celebration of Guy Fawkes' Day. At the same time, their own observance of this national holiday--and by extension that of other folk who are observing this "custom of the country" and whose bonfires dot the countryside as stars the sky--recreates far earlier celebrations: "It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot" (1.3). So it is that when the men and women begin to dance around their fire, they join hands across both time and space in a dance that spans the life of man. Much the same occurs in "To Meet, or Otherwise" where the single, muted musical note struck by the couple sounds into "the height of love's rare Universe" (to borrow a phrase from Shelley's "Epipsychidion," line 589).

This music, however muted it may be, connects the lovers in "To Meet, or Otherwise" with other couples who

have made similar music since time began--for instance, with the couple of "The Night of the Dance." In this poem Hardy describes a forbidding night, when "The cold moon hangs to the sky by its horn." Preparations are underway for a local dance. The stars appear poised for the first set--"Their westering as for a while forborne." Meanwhile, "Old Robert draws the backbrand in, / The green logs steam and spit," thus arousing the birds nesting within the roof:

Yes; far and nigh things seem to know
 Sweet scenes are impending here;
 That all is prepared; that the hour is near
 For welcomes, fellowships, and flow
 Of sally, song and cheer;

 That spigots are pulled and viols strung;
 That soon will arise the sound
 Of measures trod to tunes renowned;
 That She will return in Love's low tongue
 My vows as we wheel around. (231-2)

And only then will the stars resume their "westering," the goodnight air of the dancing lovers become the music of the spheres.

Similarly, in "To Meet, or Otherwise," the separate "notes" called into being by the assignations of all such couples compose a "symphony of human tenderness,"

expressive of "The Love"--to Hardy the exclusively human love--"that moves the sun and the other stars" in Dante's Paradise (33). This symphony seems to set the stars in motion, right as the lovers are beginning to move in their own rustic dance:

So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
 From times remote
 Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
 Supply one note,
 Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
 Somewhere afloat

Amid the spheres, as part of sick Life's antidote.

Life is surely "sick"--as wars, for instance, reveal. Emotions, like "heaps of couch-grass" burning, suddenly flare, go out of control. Even music can seem (as in "The Fiddler") to hail "from the devil"--"For it makes people do at a revel / What multiplies sins by seven" (248). The dance becomes orgiastic, the hearthfire (or bonfire) hellish--as, in The Return of the Native, for Eustacia and Wildeve at the "gipsying" (5.8). Witness also the Saturday-night revel in Jess that prepares for the heroine's ravishment (10).

Nevertheless, man's ability through love of fellow man to create order out of both the chaos of a nature "red in

tooth and claw" and that of his own dark nature--which, thanks to modern science, he can recognize as such--enables him to conceive of order in the universe. In "To Meet, or Otherwise," the art of music and dance provides the poet with a metaphor for the otherwise random scatter of stars. In a sense, all art--the creation of order out of chaos--for Hardy tells a love story. Since poetry--art in general, really--represents for him the fusion of "religion" ("loving-kindness") and "complete rationality" ("scientific knowledge"), it tells the story of how a couple, through love for each other, works to make the wilderness a home. The environmental impact of a harmonious affair of the heart is aesthetic. The homemaking of a loving couple transforms the wilderness into a work of art. The courtship of Hardy and Emma "paints" and "sculpts" the rocky hillside at Castle Boterel and makes a "love-rhyme" of the Vallency Valley. In "To Meet, or Otherwise" a romance promises to make similar music of another couple's surroundings--surroundings that here include the cosmos, where the music of the spheres becomes a symphonic medley of happy goodnight airs. It is thus that the love story of "a maid and her wight" achieves a universality over and above that which Hardy claims for just such a story when, in defence of regionalism, he modestly asserts "that the domestic emotions have throbbled

in Wessex nooks with as much intensity as in the palaces of Europe" (Personal Writings 45). In "love's rare Universe" the regional tale--of "a maid and her wight" making the wilds habitable, their "domestic emotions" athrob in "Wessex nooks"--continues to be told.

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