

A B S T R A C T

Thomas Hardy's writing cannot be separated from his personality; and that personality was in part moulded by a variety of social and family pressures. His upbringing in a remote part of England which was undergoing transition confronted him with the daily phenomenon of change, and not infrequently of suffering. Side by side with ancient habits and customs he saw the slow encroachment of a new order which appeared, at times, to challenge his strongest sympathies. In his own family he confronted a once-powerful race now shorn of most its possessions and all of its social rank. While recognising his family past with genuine pride, Hardy was nonetheless disturbed by signs of irregularities of conduct among each branch of his family, and he appears to have been disturbed by the facts of his own birth, which took place less than six months after his parents' marriage. His sensitivity about his family's past, together with his own emotional involvements as a young man, appear to be primarily responsible for the presence of ancestry and heredity as recurring themes in the poems and the novels. Any account of Hardy's early manhood must consider the assertions of Lois Deacon, both those proved and those remaining questionable (Providence and Mr. Hardy, London, 1966); just as any understanding of his personality must take account of the English and American collections of letters from Hardy and his two wives.

Intellectually, Hardy was affected by Darwinism and the "rational" approach to religion; he may have been affected, too, by his own rejection by the Church. At all events, his ~~own~~ Christian faith collapsed, and he began a life-long search for some replacement for his lost faith, a replacement to be based on reason rather than

emotion, though satisfying to the latter. In this he may have failed, but his inquiry brought him into contact with the main streams of philosophy, and still more with the minor streams represented by essayists and correspondents of the Victorian periodicals. A review of the notebooks made from these and other sources shows a life-long preoccupation with the nature of human conduct, and the degree of freedom accorded to man. An intellectual development is shown in these notes which parallels the development of the earlier novels, and which is also reflected in the poems. The novels, up to and including The Return of the Native, embody a fairly consistent argument. From the beginning Hardy is concerned with the plight of man as a conscious being in a universe whose control is in the hands of unconscious forces: not merely whatever creative powers may exist, but also the forces of decay, death, and destruction. The earliest novels, however, are equally concerned with the nature of society as a single structure belonging to a larger organism which embraces the natural environment and the universal. Even in Under the Greenwood Tree Hardy presupposes a natural unity which is not so distant from the organism presented in The Dynasts. The preservation and maintenance of the social unit, and thus the health of the total organism, is shown to be partly in the hands of men. Man may, by creating and preserving a balance between creative and destructive forces, also create the opportunity for the material improvement of his environment. Thus the nature of men's decisions, and the pressures to which they respond in making choice, become a fundamental theme of Hardy's earlier work. In particular, there is a stress on the

unreliability of emotional or irrational choice, and the desirability of reasoned decision based on an understanding of universal and environmental forces, as well as on an understanding of the self. Man is seen, on the one hand, as a part of the natural organism; he is also seen, however, as distinguished from the natural organism, isolated by his possession of consciousness. He is obliged to accept the existence of universal forces, Chance, Time, and Decay; he is also obliged to recognise that his own actions are subject to the force of Consequence. Forethought, therefore, becomes a principal requirement of his reasoning powers. Throughout there is the assumption that 'good' conduct is conduct aimed at the material improvement of men's conditions, and, as an implicit corollary of this, at the ~~e~~ⁱmination of pain.

The Return of the Native marks a development of these ideas. The personal equilibrium displayed in Gabriel Oak of Far From the Madding Crowd, achieved through growth and self-knowledge, is not abandoned as a desirable objective which creates a parallel equilibrium in society; but there is a recognition that reason and consciousness are themselves products of evolution. This perception is accompanied by the further insight that with the emergence of consciousness has come a new awareness of men's predicament, and consequently a change in their understanding of their environment and their attitude towards it. In Clym and Eustacia Hardy embodies the new and the old forms of perception and aesthetic response, and shows that in this world the old way is not merely inadequate, but unable to survive. Thus a novel which seems originally designed to repeat the themes of Far From the Madding Crowd was drastically re-cast to become virtually an allegorical treatment

of modes of understanding. However, the book embodies, too, Hardy's regret at the necessity of a new awareness, and suggests that his sympathies were strongly with the past though his reason recognised the new.

The Mayor of Casterbridge returns to the theme of the organic society, and to the pattern of consequence which human actions may create. For the first time, too, Hardy faces openly the incompatibility between the claims of the temperamental individual and the claims of society. Again there appears to be a conflict between his sympathy for the individual and his reason, which approves the communal purpose.

In Hardy's subsequent works these earlier themes are not abandoned, even though there is a stronger awareness of the irrational and potentially destructive nature of the passions and of sexuality. The basic premises of his approach to society are not altered. Nonetheless, there is a greater recognition that human institutions are frequently ill-adapted to their environment, and that in ignoring the passions they make it harder and not easier for men to function. The attack on the laws governing marriage and divorce grows naturally from his concern with the social organism however, and his concept of the nature of society is not different in kind from that of Under the Greenwood Tree ^{and} Far From the Madding Crowd. These novels, the later one more centrally, show an awareness that corruption may affect the social organism as easily as the individual. In each case the responsibility is man's, since man alone possesses the faculty of understanding.

In these later novels, however, not only intellectual pressures are at work. Personal and subjective features become dominant, and the themes of sexual and hereditary

determinism spring ~~as~~ much from personal obsession as from rational inquiry. Hardy's youthful attitudes and experiences, never completely absent, become central to an understanding of his work. Jude the Obscure in particular depends for its force on pressures not directly related to the book's themes, nor arising from them. A difference of kind is to be observed between the earlier and the later novels, the former springing primarily from intellectual motives, the latter from subjective preoccupations.

The Dynasts marks a return to the intellectual approach, and embodies and develops the principal ideas of the earlier novels. From the nature of its subject it can avoid the personal issues present in the later works; these issues, so far as they survive, become the subject-matter of the poems. Once more there is a stress on the limited scope for action in men's lives; once more an emphasis on the need to use such freedom as remains. The epic applies the theory of a collective will, guided by mute opinion and even at times by the individual. The perception, too, that reason is a product of evolution is developed: evolution affects the entire organism of which man and nature are but parts; but through man's consciousness he may embrace the power not merely to perceive his situation, but slowly to influence development along lines beneficial to men's comfort. The tragic nature of perception, expressed in so many poems and implicit in The Return of the Native, is reviewed once more, and Hardy's answer is not despair but hope. The decision to end The Dynasts on this note is logically a conclusion to the epic and a culmination of the ideas present in the novels.

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR AND
RESPONSIBILITY IN THE PROSE
WORKS OF THOMAS HARDY

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[MT 1968]



A NOTE ON THE DOCUMENTARY MATERIAL

Some documentary material has been added to this work. For the convenience of the reader this has been included in a second, separate volume. A list of the material has also been included in the table of contents of this first volume, however.

PREFACE

This work grew from the conclusions of my B.Litt. thesis, submitted to Oxford University in 1964. My view at that time was that the poems of Thomas Hardy, and most especially The Dynasts, possessed a strong vein of thought which in any other author would have been described as optimistic. I found it impossible to see Hardy's epic in terms of "Fate", unless that term were carefully and narrowly defined; and I found that to his human characters Hardy gave a small measure of freedom and a large measure of responsibility. Notwithstanding the interference in the novels of external or environmental forces, I believed that they would produce the same portrait of man, and would stand before The Dynasts in time as a logical prelude to Hardy's mature thought.

To some extent that belief has been justified. What I made no allowance for, however, was the presence of autobiographical features in Hardy's work. Of course I was aware that some events in the novels could be closely compared to events in Hardy's career, and that a large number of ideas attributed to his characters could be regarded as Hardy's own opinions. I was not aware of the degree of subjective emotional commitment involved in the later novels, and I did not consider the impact which this commitment might have upon Hardy's ideas. To this extent these pages have taken a course slightly different from my first anticipations.

This has affected the relative proportions of the work, about which something should be said. New

biographical knowledge, some of it established but some falling very far short of certainty, has had to be included in these pages if the comparison I have made between the earlier and the later work is to hold good. The nature of the information, and the scanty evidence for some of it, has necessitated rather more discussion than would normally have a place in a work devoted primarily to Hardy's opinions. I make no apology for this: biographical material has been included because I do not believe it possible to appreciate the nature of Hardy's works without it. However, the reader deserves some warning that it is there.

Wherever possible I have tried to gather primary material rather than rely on published sources. Occasionally the results of this were surprising, and I am aware that some of the judgements I have made will not accord well with popular views of Thomas Hardy. Such judgements have emerged most particularly from the letters preserved in a number of libraries on both sides of the Atlantic. If the views I have occasionally expressed or suggested seem surprising that merely reinforces the plea I would make for the early and complete publication of the letters of Hardy and his two wives. I cannot tell whether these letters have been closely read by Hardy's biographers, although I would hope and imagine that they must have been; in any event, the almost universally sympathetic attitude to Hardy, and the critical approach to his two wives (especially the first) deserve to be reviewed. Again, I make no apology for including judgements of Hardy the man: man and author are the same person, in the case of Hardy most especially.

The amount of help I have received has been enormous. My supervisor, Professor Dame Helen Gardner, has, I confess, intimidated me from the first with her own scholarship, and with the attention she has paid to many of the following pages; she has treated me with courtesy and kindness, and to the respect and admiration which I already felt she has evoked in me an additional sense of gratitude and liking. I am not sure whether she will enjoy these pages; but they would have been weaker indeed without her help.

Among Hardy scholars I have also received generous treatment: from Mr. F.B. Pinion of Sheffield University; and most especially from Professor J.O. Bailey of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In frequent letters and during lengthy conversations in England and America, he has shown an interest in my work which has been all the more valued because of his own high standing among scholars in this field. During a period of five weeks he entertained me in his own home to what was, in effect, a continuous Hardy seminar, and he allowed me to read the draft typescript of his forthcoming major work on the poems. To him and his wife I have to acknowledge not merely continuous assistance, but also an unstinting friendship. Similarly, I have formed a close working and personal friendship with Mr. J. Stevens Cox and Miss Lois Deacon, both of whom have given me access to otherwise unavailable primary material. Whatever the scholastic results for this work, the undertaking has brought me into warm personal contact with courteous and generous scholars, and that in itself has been rewarding.

To the staff of a number of institutions I offer

my thanks to the Berg Collection, New York Public Library; the Library of Colby College, Waterville, Maine; the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Mr. F.B. Adams, Director of the Pierpont-Morgan Library, New York; and the Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; the National Library of Scotland; the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and the Library of Queen's College, Oxford; the Curator of the Dorset County Museum, and the Dorset County Archivist; Mr. H.P.R. Hoare and the National Trust, for permission to consult the Stourhead Papers in the Wiltshire County Archives; the British Museum Manuscripts Room; the Literary Department of Somerset House; and the Public Records Office. And also to the staff of the library of Åbo Akademi, who have taken care to obtain for me books not readily available in Finland. Among individuals are Miss A.M.D. Ashley, Principal of the College of Sarum St. Michael, Salisbury; Mr. John Antell; Mr. E.D. Blackford and the managers of Puddletown Primary School; Mrs. Eleanor Bowden; Mr. E.G.B. Moore; Mr. Peter Millward; Mr. Patrick Quinlivan; Lektor Tony Lurcock; Fröken Clara Andersson; Lektor Malcolm Hardy; and Mrs Carl J. Weber.

One major debt of gratitude is also due to Professor H.W. Donner, of Uppsala University, who made it possible for me to revisit England at intervals without financial difficulty, and who also saw to it that I was able to spend two months in the United States to consult the many Hardy documents there. In material and moral encouragement Professor Donner's generosity has been outstanding.

My final summary, it should be stated, draws slightly on the closing section of my B.Litt. thesis.

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ABBREVIATIONS

References to Hardy's novels have throughout been to Chapter numbers, to facilitate reference to editions other than that used for this text. References to the Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy (London, 1930) are indicated by the letters C.P., followed by the page number on which the poem begins. Other references are as follows:

Life:- the single volume The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928, London, 1962.

Notebooks:- Thomas Hardy's Notebooks and Some Letters from Julia Augusta Martin, ed. Evelyn Hardy, London, 1955.

Some Recollections:- Some Recollections by Emma Hardy With Some Relevant Poems by Thomas Hardy, ed. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings, Oxford, 1961.

Beaminster:- Monographs on the Life, Times, and Works of Thomas Hardy, ed. J. Stevens Cox, published at Beaminster and St. Peter Port. A list of the monographs, with their numbers, is given in the Bibliography.

T H O M A S H A R D Y : T H E M A N

school which the townsmen had refounded ten years earlier, it had been a noble and far-sighted gesture. His nineteenth-century successors waited for forty years before State intervention could recreate what had once been "a seminary of excellence and repute."

Yet this was the Dorset of 1840: remote, poor, its present composed of memories, its future of uncertainties. The countryside was emptying, though those who found dirt and degradation in the cities were often leaving rural conditions which were also far from idyllic. One writer sketched the village scene in 1846:

The first feature which attracts the attention of a stranger on entering the village is the total want of cleanliness which pervades it. A stream, composed of the matter which constantly escapes from pigsties and other receptacles of filth, meanders down each street, being here and there collected into standing pools, which lie festering and rotting in the sun so as to create wonder that the place is not the continual abode of pestilence -- indeed the worst malignant fevers have raged here at different times. . . . the inside of the cottages in every respect corresponds with the external appearance of the place. The wages here in very few instances exceed seven shillings per week.

Another fruitful source of misery, as well as immorality, is the great inadequacy of the number and size of the houses . . . The want of proper ventilation in these houses must be to the last degree detrimental to the health of the inhabitants; the atmosphere of the sleeping apartments, to an unpractised nose, is almost insupportable. . . . In no single instance did I observe

Especially

meat of any kind during my progress through the parish . . . Want, famine, and misery, are the features of the village, . . . 1.

During the Irish troubles of 1846 reports such as these convinced the House of Commons that there was distress in Dorset equal to that to be found in Ireland, and a full inquiry conducted by The Times gave the county a bad name which has still not entirely disappeared. The modern notion of Dorset as a sleepy, backward area is almost entirely a nineteenth-century legacy. It was not a sleepy or an out-of-the-way place for George III, and had played its part in earlier history. King John had his hunting-lodges in the county; Charles II remembered it with affection. Off the southern coast of Dorset the Armada had been battered by the English men-of-war, and a large number of loyal Dorset ships sailed from the harbours to join the fight, Sir Christopher Hatton's son rushing from Corfe Castle to take the lead. Eight hundred years earlier King Alfred had seen the Danish fleet slowly destroyed in these same stormy waters, as a monument at Swanage recalls. Everywhere there were reminders of the past, from the Celtic tumuli and the mighty hill-forts -- including Maiden Castle and Badbury, perhaps the lost Mount Badon -- to the Regency fronts, elegant and prosperous, gazing impassively across Weymouth Bay. Even in the nineteenth century the independent spirit which had made the Dorset Club Men rise up

1. "The Peasantry of Dorset, 1846", Illustrated London News, September 5, 1846. Reprinted at the Toucan Press, Beaminster, 1963.

against both sides in the Civil War was not dead: in 1833 six men from the decaying village of Tolpuddle were transported ~~to~~^{as} criminals from Britain, but left their names behind them in one of the most honoured early phases of the Trades Union Movement.

It was, as it has always been, a county of great contrasts, material and spiritual. Shaped like a diamond, and in prosperous times a very jewel among the English counties, its chalk, clay, and gravel had been moulded into swelling downs, low, well-watered valleys, and sombre heath. On the east superb chalk cliffs fell sheer into the sea; on the west the long marvel of the Chesil Bank stretched itself from Portland to Lyme Regis, its pebbles so finely sorted by the tides that on the darkest midnight smugglers could identify their landfall by the size of the stones in their hands. On one side of Portland lay King George's watering-place; on the other the troubled waters of Dead Man's Bay picked the bones among the wreckage of generations of sailing-ships unable to round the Bill in south-west gales. In the middle of the twentieth century I have stood as a boy on the banks of the Chesil, muttering with pagan force the old Portland wreckers' prayer:

Blow wind, rise storm,
Ship ashore before morn!

And in the nineteenth century this childhood rhyme still held meaning as an invocation. At sea and inland there were records of cruelty and violence,

even judicial violence. The legend of Judge Jeffreys, who sentenced ninety-four men of Dorset to the gallows is still not dead. In Maumbury Rings, the Roman amphitheatre of Dorchester, Mary Channing was first strangled and then burnt before an audience of thousands one fine spring day in 1705; and one section of the Roman ring remains damaged to this day by the trampling of men and horses round the gallows. When, later, executions were transferred to the comparative secrecy of the prison, the crowds would stand knee-deep in the waters of the Frome to catch a glimpse of the hanging man. Bear-baiting and cock-fighting had their appointed place only a few minutes walk from the Town Hall, and their traces were still visible in the first half of the nineteenth century; and into modern times fox-hunting has remained a cruel, if colourful sport. "Nowhere is the crime of vulpicide more odious", wrote one observer in 1862,¹ recalling an ardent sportsman who expressed himself thus tersely: "Sir, I believe a man who would kill a fox would kill his own father."

Other, more occult pastimes still lingered. Witchcraft survived, and perhaps still does. The pinning and roasting of an effigy, beliefs in hag-ridden horses, the evil eye, and the more benevolent powers of the local prophet or weather-man, were a powerful rival to Christian enlightenment:

. . . the Church of England is all very well
for Sunday worship, for tithes, for testimony

1. Quarterly Review, April, 1862, p. 289.

to the fitness of the social order; but when the cows are bewitched and the butter won't come, when the horses of a morning are reeking with sweat, shall I then run to the vicar? It is pious and proper to pray for rain; it will help my crops more to have the weather-wizard try his spells. When I am "overlooked", it is no time to love my neighbour as myself, but a time to use magic against magic, white witchcraft against black. Failing this, there is only ill luck, sickness, and death.

This confession of faith on the part of the peasant reveals the fact that witchcraft is not only primitive, but a desperate faith, an appeal in time of stress to a power that is mightier, or at least more cunning and watchful, than the power employed by one's enemy. 1.

Other, gentler, charms were used to guarantee the future. On the coast the fishermen of Abbotsbury tossed garlands off the Chesil Bank as a gesture of propitiation to the sea, just as the local children do to-day; and in the same village only twenty years ago a local prophet -- in all ways a respectable and respected citizen -- responded with a rhyming couplet of wisdom to the children's cries of:

Mr. Morley,
Tell us a story.

Mr. Morley was simply a later counterpart of the Planet-Ruler of Melbury Osmund, Conjuror Minterne of Batcombe, ^{or} the famous conjuror of the Blackmore Vale.² Superstition and Christian acceptance flourished side by side, with little incongruity. In the figure of the Devil

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1. Ruth A. Firor, Folkways in Thomas Hardy, New York, 1931; new edition 1962, p. 83.

2. Notebooks, pp. 40-41.

the powers of black magic were absorbed into a Christian terminology, but they were absorbed only, and not destroyed, and the symbols of the Church itself often represented forms of white magic, as indeed they still do in the ritual of exorcism. Nor were ancient customs combined only with the symbols of the Church, for the hierarchy of the saints was adapted to local purposes:

St. Catherine, St. Catherine,
Lend me thine aid,
Granting that I do not die an old maid.
A husband, St. Catherine,
A good one, St. Catherine,
But arn-a-one better than narn-a-one,
Please, St. Catherine,
Soon, St. Catherine . . .

sang the local maidens, with their fingers placed in a hand-mark miraculously preserved in the wall of St. Catherine's Chapel.

The ^{res}community in which these beliefs and superstitions flourished were small, tightly-knit, and innately conservative. Sometimes gathered around a big house, they were often scattered in remote hamlets, untouched by the outside world, and suspicious of its ambassadors. A journey to the county town was an adventure, the inhabitants of the next village "foreign". Incoming families remained "new" for two or three generations, and in most of the villages, even now, the population is dominated by half a dozen families whose intermarriages over several centuries form the most bewildering -- and perhaps disturbing -- pedigrees.

Illegitimacy, and even incest, were commonplace, and often the inhabitants of a single village may still be identified as easily as the members of a single family; and the families themselves bear the features of men who three or four centuries ago were powerful figures in the land: the Daubeneys, the Trenchards, the Churchills (whose cousins have not been inactive in our own times), the Nappers, -- and more colourfully still, the Virgins and the Bastards -- these names still figure in Dorset, and carry memories of their knighted and illustrious origins.

But the pattern of decline in 1840 was not universal, and it was deceptive. Sheep-farming, for which Dorset was famous, was certainly disappearing -- it is possible to drive across modern Dorset without seeing a single flock, though the position is now improving; in 1862 the sheep and wool markets here were still more than double the value of those of any corresponding area of England.¹ Mechanical aids and new methods of cultivation were slowly being introduced. The water-meadows along the Frome yielded fine grazing land, the Downs were being steadily furrowed and improved by the use of artificial fertilizers, and even the large tracts of heathland were gradually yielding to the plough. Yet wages, high in some areas, were generally low; and practical improvements on the land had only just begun. Rick-burning and machine-breaking were not yet past, though they were dying, and the farm-workers themselves slowly learning to gather with their masters to discuss

1. Quarterly Review, April, 1862, p. 287.

methods of improving their conditions and their products. Dorset was in a state of transition, edging itself slowly, perhaps reluctantly, into the modern world. As the railways broke through~~x~~they quickened, though they did not ease, the process; and perhaps it is not entirely finished yet.

It was into this world of transition that Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840. His family were no strangers to the district. Since John le Hardye left Jersey in 1488 they had been dwellers in the Frome valley. Thomas Hardye of Frampton, Knight Marshal for Elizabeth I,¹ had endowed the Grammar School of Dorchester in 1579, and was in return acknowledged as its founder (though truly the borough elders, who rescued it from the ruins of monasticism in 1569, deserve that honourable title); in the early years of William and Mary a Thomas Hardy had been Sheriff of the County;² and a little more than thirty years before the novelist's birth Captain Thomas Hardy had held the dying Nelson in his arms, and had taken place as chief mourner at the splendid London funeral. It was a past of which any family might be proud: yet there are hints that all had not been well. The county law suits reveal more than one internal dispute, one Robert Hardy, for example, being disinherited and "sent into Ireland for reasons which it is not ~~fit~~ should be mentioned".³ Even the august founder of the Grammar School may have disinherited his daughter for some unrecorded

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1. CSP, Dom., 1547-80, p. 127.
 2. Hutchin, History of Dorset, 3rd ed., I, xliii.
 3. Dorset Suits (Dorset County Museum), VI (1646).

cause, since she figures as an (unsuccessful) claimant to his property after his death.¹ There is more than one suggestion of hot-bloodedness to be found in these records, and in Hardy's own comments about his ancestry: he recalls in "Family Portraits",² for example, their "dark doings each against each", and regards them as "expert/In the law-lacking passions of life". The records give an incomplete picture of this passionate family blood, and Hardy himself, though he knew some of the details, scarcely ever referred to them openly; but there are veiled allusions in Jude the Obscure, a novel which, despite its author's denials, contains more family history than he would have ever cared to recognise in public or in print. At this distance the full stories are obscure, though some of the details have survived.

Among the women of his family there was his grandmother, Mary Head of Fawley, Berkshire, whose memories "were so poignant that she never dared to return to the place after she had left it as a young girl".³ Her mother, formerly Mary Hopson and the wife of James Head of Fawley, had buried her husband on May 6, 1772, five months before the younger Mary's birth. Seven years later, in April, 1779, Mary Hopson Head gave birth to an illegitimate son, William, who died one week after baptism. No father was named in the records, and when Mary Hopson died, just six days later, little Mary Head was left an orphan. These are the bare facts, publicly recorded;⁴ at this distance it seems impossible

1. Somerset House, Administration Books, 1599, 1605. See also Southerington, The Early Hardys, Toucan Press, 1968.

2. C.P. 878.

3. Life, p.420.

4. Fawley Parish Registers.

Taken with other autobiographical elements in Jude, these details suggest that there was some parallel between the experiences of Mary Head and her family, and events closer to Hardy himself. Yet "Family Portraits" refers to "some drama, obscure", a tragic love-match which appears to be confined to his own parents (Hardy's poems, where they deal with facts, are usually precisely accurate, and the only known portraits to which he could have been referring are those of his parents). And certainly a disturbed past was not confined to one side only of his family. Describing his maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Swetman, Hardy writes: "Among Elizabeth's children there was one, a girl, of unusual ability and judgement, and an energy that might have carried her to incalculable issues. This was the child Jemima, the mother of Thomas Hardy."¹ When he goes on to recall the very stressful experiences of her youth, experiences which she was reluctant to recall even in old age, one is struck by the similarity between Hardy's description of her and his account of Mary Head; nor is it fanciful to believe that in this "energy capable of incalculable issues" we have one of the many strands which later emerged in the character of Tess.

There are other mysteries, too. In a pedigree drawn up by Hardy himself, and now in the Dorset County Museum,² he records that the marriage of his maternal grandparents, George Hand and Elizabeth Swetman,

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1. Life, pp. 7-8. See also my subsequent comments on Jemima Hardy.

2. This has been reproduced in Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy, A Critical Biography, London, 1954.

was "clandestine", and the poem "In Sherborne Abbey"¹ would appear to refer to this, since, so far as has been discovered, there are no other traditions of clandestine marriages or elopements in the family; yet the poem is clearly labelled "a family tradition". But the banns for the marriage of George and Elizabeth were called quite regularly in Melbury Osmund Church, despite the opposition of Elizabeth's crusty father, yeoman John Swetman. Moreover, a daughter, Maria Hand, was born just eight days after the marriage,² and this would have made any elopement difficult, not to say dangerous, for Elizabeth. Possibly they eloped much earlier, and returned to marry in the face of John Swetman's disapproval only when the child was a compelling reason for him to swallow his opposition. To complicate the situation still more, Hardy's poem "To Her Late Husband"³ would appear to refer to George Hand and Elizabeth Swetman: and in the poem the wife asks that her husband's body be buried by another woman, his wife in the sight of God, and that she herself might be buried under her maiden name and among her own folk. Yet if Elizabeth was close to childbirth at the time of her marriage, then she, as much as any other woman, was his wife in the sight of God.

Hardy certainly delved into these local records, as the poems and the Life reveal; and he appears to have been genuinely disturbed by what he found, and perhaps still more by what he conjectured.

1. C.P. 721.
2. See Melbury Registers, and Beaminster 34.
3. C.P. 1515.

One still faces the details of this family history with the feeling that one is on the edge of a consistently tragic family career, yet they are so elusive that it seems impossible to trace any pattern with certainty. Even so, the notion of an "ancestral curse" in Jude the Obscure, and the scattered references to ancestry and heredity in poetry and prose reinforce the view that Hardy himself had traced a pattern, albeit a vague one, and that at times he was obsessed by it, feeling himself bound to repeat the pattern of his forefathers, his character and conduct controlled by the dead generations:

'Why wake up all this?' I cried out. 'Now, so late!
 Let old ghosts be laid!
 And they stiffened, drew back to their frames and numb state,
 Gibbering: 'Thus are your own ways to shape, know too late!'

. . . Nights long stretched awake I have lain
 Perplexed in endeavours to balk future pain
 By uncovering the drift of their drama. In vain,
 Though therein lay my own. 1.

This horror-stricken meditation is paralleled in "The Pedigree":²

So, scanning my sire-sown tree,
 And the hieroglyphs of this spouse tied to that,
 With offspring mapped below in lineage,
 Till the tangles troubled me,
 The branches seemed to twist into a seared and cynic face
 Which winked and tokened towards the window like a
 Mage
 Enchanting me to gaze thereat. Again

It was a mirror now,
 And in it a long perspective I could trace

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1. C.P. 878.
2. C.P. 431.

Of my begetters, dwindling backward each past each
 All with the kindred look,
 Whose names had since been inked down in their place
 On the recorder's book,
 Generationx and generation of my mien, and build, and brow.

And then I did divine
 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;
 The first of them, the primest fuglemen of my line,
 Being fogged in far antiqueness past surmise and reason's reach.

Said I then, sunk in tone,
 'I am merest mimicker and counterfeit! --
 Though thinking, I am I,
And what I do I do myself alone.'

Had he so needed, Hardy could have found contemporary scientific opinion to support him in this view. Writing in the Fortnightly Review in 1883¹ Francis Galton had argued the need for medical family registers which would allow men in time to foretell "in a general way, which are the families naturally fated to decay and which to thrive, which are those who will die out and which will be prolific and fill the vacant space." A year previously, in the same vein, he had commented on the "surprisingly small margin [which] seemed to be left to the effects of what we are accustomed to call "free-will"". ² Whether Hardy read these words or not -- and in view of his frequent reference to the Fortnightly in his literary notebooks³ he probably did -- the message was one which he was to heed to a very marked extent. He was an avid student

1. Volume 34, July-December, 1883, pp. 244-50.
2. Volume 31, January-June, 1882, pp. 332-38.
3. Dorset County Museum. See Below, p. 88.

of local records, and he confessed his own approach to the official genealogies when he wrote in the Preface to A Group of Noble Dames:

. . . the careful comparison of dates alone -- that of birth with marriage, of marriage with death, of one marriage, birth, or death, with a kindred marriage, birth, or death -- will often effect the same transformation [into a palpitating drama], and anybody practised in raising images from such genealogies finds himself unconsciously filling into the framework the motives, passions, and personal qualities which would appear to be the single explanation possible of some extraordinary conjunction in times, events, and personages that occasionally marks these reticent family records.

If he approached his own family records in this light he may well have conjectured too much. For it is a simple fact that the home of Hardy's maternal ancestors lies at the gateway of a great house, that there are odd conjunctions of dates -- the most striking being the marriage of Elizabeth Swetman referred to above: Elizabeth, who was the owner of thirty gowns and a stock of reading "of an exceptional extent for a yeoman's daughter living in a remote place"¹-- that Hardy himself adjusted the early pages of the Life to give a sequence of events quite incompatible with the local records, and that the late Earl of Ilchester, one of whose forbears boasted that he "had peeped an entire village",² was strongly inclined to believe that Ilchester blood flowed in the Hardy veins. This is indeed conjecture, and some would regard it as shocking conjecture; shocking it may be, but idle it is not. The course of Hardy's career was in part determined by his attitude to the family past, and his attitude towards the degree of freedom possessed

1. Life, p. 7.

2. Papers of Rebekah Owen, Colby College, Waterville, Maine.

by his heroes and heroines was based on a conflict between doctrines which received his intellectual assent, and emotional convictions which swayed, and at times undermined, his intellect.

If he worried about this ancestral pattern, he was equally sensitive about his own birth. His parents were married at Melbury Osmund on December 22, 1839, when Jemima was already pregnant -- Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, five and a half months later, and christened in July.¹ When preparing his wife for the production of a posthumous biography, Hardy appears to have toyed with the idea of obscuring the dates completely. One early entry, not reproduced in the Life, reads:

1848. Thomas Hardy, the third child, was rather fragile . . . 2.

-- even though Florence Hardy must have been as well aware as the author himself of the relative ages of his brother and two sisters.³ Another cancelled passage mixes probable fact with certain fiction?

. . . his mother learned tambouring, and was a skilful embroiderer of kid gloves; but her eyes being weakened she formed the idea of becoming a club-house cook and, it is believed, applied to Henry, 2nd Earl of Ilchester, to assist her. It appears that he sent her to his brother, the Hon. Charles Fox-Strangways, where she became a skilful cook, accompanying the family to London. Here she meant to take a further stride, but on returning met her future husband, and was married to him at the age of five-and-twenty.

The club-house idea was, however, not

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1. Life, p. 1, and registers of Melbury Osmund and Stinsford.
 2. "Notes of Thomas Hardy's Life, by Florence Hardy (taken down in conversations, etc)"-- Dorset County Museum. My italics.
 3. See accompanying file for respective dates of baptism.

abandoned by her, and in a few months she proposed to leave her husband in the country and seek such a post. To this he objected, & the birth of children gave the death-blow to this rather adventurous scheme.

Such an account is clearly incompatible with the verifiable facts of Hardy's birth and the timely marriage of Jemima and the elder Thomas Hardy. It may have been the knowledge that such facts were verifiable that led Hardy or his wife to delete such confusions from the book -- though even in print Hardy tries to gain an extra year by stating that his mother was twenty-five at the time of her marriage: born in 1813, baptised in September of that year, she was over twenty-six when she walked the aisle of Melbury Church.¹ The most important message of such passages, however, is the sensitivity of Hardy on this point, and this sensitivity may have in part accounted for his shyness and reticence in later years.

For it was in his late youth and early manhood that Hardy encountered these mysteries in their most dramatic light, and it may have been when his own career was beginning to resemble them, when it was touched with tragic issues, that he first brooded deeply over them. For he seems to have grown up in an atmosphere of security at home, and no little adventure out of the home. To the townsman it may seem dull enough to be born and bred on the outer perimeter of a heath: for a young and sensitive child this sombre tract of land was a continual

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1. Registers of Melbury Osmund. There are several other instances where Hardy, who was certainly familiar with the records, omits precise dates from Chapter I of the Life, and substitutes instead an incorrect age, or in some degree otherwise distorts the narrative.

mystery. The changing voice of the trees, the innumerable variety of flora and fauna, and above all the almost unbroken solitude of this region of conifers, ferns, and open sandy ledges where lizards and snakes lay basking during the summer months -- all these made an impression so vivid that it was never forgotten. The Egdon Heath of a modern imagination is almost entirely Hardy's personal creation: but that should not blind us to the reality of the heath as it is, and still more as it was more than a century ago. The railway which bisects Egdon, the nuclear research station which stands on its southern fringe, the military training centre, the tank ranges, and the steady encroachment of modern agriculture, have all acted to destroy the landscape: yet there are vales still which throb beneath a burning sun, regions in which the red-dleman would come as no surprise, and pools which spring into a short but uninterrupted life with the ingress of each year. In these vales, and not least behind Hardy's own birthplace, one can still recapture the mood which dominated the mind of Hardy as a child.

Sensitive he certainly was. The sound of music could bring tears into his eyes almost before he could distinguish between tunes. His father, the genial and unambitious stone-mason, gave him an accordion at the age of four, and later a violin. Soon he was sufficiently master of the instrument to play for local dances, feeling his blood thrill with the excitement of the rhythm, and watching young men and maidens grow passionate and cadaverous as the

hours advanced. From both sides of the family he inherited a strong love of music, and this, too, in his later years was to emerge as a powerful influence on his art, and was perhaps his salvation as a poet. His mastery of rhythm in verse was never so sure as when some deeply-hidden and remembered melody surged up within him to control his pen. Nor was it only a memory. In 1918, at the age of 77, dissatisfied with the dancing in a local production of the dramatised Mellstock Quire, "he took a lady as his partner and . . . nimbly demonstrated to the assembled company the correct steps and positions." Then, "borrowing the violin, he played in a lively manner all the required tunes from memory."¹

He looked back upon his youthful excursions as the last occasions on which the old country ballads were sung, and though this may not be strictly true, the experience of hearing them was to remain with him, as was the conduct of Francis Pitney Martin, the local squire, who showed himself "by no means strait-laced" with the girls.² The child had a delight in imitation, and powers of memory and observation. On wet Sundays, when the trees dripped, and the lanes to the little church at Stinsford were too thick with mud for walking, he would wrap a blanket around his shoulders, mount a chair, and preach to the assembled congregation -- his grandmother Mary Head, and a cousin -- closely following from memory the vicar's most recent texts. Later, watching the vicar himself in the pulpit, he imagined a twitch of profane

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1. Beaminster, 15.

2. Life, p. 19.

merriment on that reverend gentleman's face as the solemn words flowed forth, and with a mixture of delight and revulsion found an irresistible impulse to laughter ~~was~~ bubbling up within him. Life was always unpredictable, and the illusion of reality might be swept aside at any moment. Watching, as a tiny child, the no-Popery demonstrations in Maumbury rings, he gazed with fascination at the lurid procession of monks filed past, to be shocked as a sudden gust of wind blew a cowl aside and revealed the face of one of his father's own workmen.

Where there was laughter, the smiles might be wiped away by the presence of cruelty and evil. Accustomed to walk happily across the fields with his father, he was slowly made aware of the cruelty in man and nature. His father threw a stone at a bird, "possibly meaning not to hit it"; but the bird fell dead. The feel of the cold, starved creature in his hand never left him, and he recalled the sensation even on his deathbed. With his own eyes he witnessed death by starvation, and from his father he learned of floggings by the Town Pump at Dorchester. ^{Once,} ~~On~~ on a visit to relatives at Puddletown, he saw a man sitting in the stocks, and admired his own bravery in talking to him. On another, terrible, occasion he watched a transported poacher say farewell to his wife and family. Worst of all, there were the hangings. Looking towards Dorchester one day he focussed his father's telescope on the grim prison that overlooks the Frome, not knowing that this was a day fixed for execution. As the building came into sight he saw the victim drop, and crept homewards, "feeling himself alone on the heath with the hanged man". Yet there must

have been a fascination: in 1856, at the age of sixteen, Hardy watched the hanging of Martha Brown, executed at Dorchester for the murder of her husband; seventy years later he recalled "what a fine figure she showed against the sky as she hung in the misty rain, and how the tight black/gown set off her shape as she wheeled half-round and back".¹

^ silk

Early critics of A Pair of Blue Eyes objected to Hardy's allusion to Elfride's figure beneath her wet dress (Chapter XXII) as if it were suggestive; it seems far more likely that this childhood experience forced its way into his imagination. For these were moments when the pressure of living seemed too great a burden for his frame, times when all around him "there seemed to be something glaring, garish, rattling, and the noise and glares hit upon the little cell called your life, and shook it, and warped it."² At times like this he was afraid of growing up.

Yet growing up was part of life, and life, as it slowly unfolded, was a series of losses, "fallings from us, vanishings". While he was yet in his second year the Mellstock Quire, that small body of dedicated musicians who had served Stinsford Church for three generations, was dissolved, and even the gallery in which they had performed was dismantled and destroyed. A few years later Hardy learned for the first time of the losses suffered by his own family in the Frome valley:

The decline and fall of the Hardys much in evidence hereabout. An instance: Becky S.'s mother's sister married one of the Hardys of

1. Beaminster, 25.

2. Jude the Obscure, I-i. The passage is autobiographical -- Cf. Life, pp. 15-16, C.P. 846, and C.P. 825.

this branch, who was considered to have bemeaned himself by the marriage. "All Woolcombe and Froom Quintin belonged to them at one time", Becky used to say proudly. She might have added Up-Sydling and Toller Wlhelme. This particular couple had an enormous lot of children. I remember when young seeing the man -- tall and thin -- walking beside a horse and common spring trap, and my mother pointing him out to me and saying he represented what was once the leading branch of the family. So we go down, down, down. 1.

Here again we may notice Hardy's curiously ambivalent attitude to his own family: that he had a genuine pride in the past achievements of his line is certain, yet, disguised in this passage, is the deepest disillusion with his own immediate forbears. For the passage is deceptive: the man did represent the leading branch of the family, but he was not "tall and thin", and he did not "have an enormous lot of children". He is in fact Thomas Hardy's father. There is only one Becky S. who was connected with the Hardy's through the marriage of her mother, and that is Rebecca Sparks, Hardy's cousin; and Becky's mother's sister is no other than Jemima Hand, Hardy's mother. The man's stature and his children are either pure invention, or they have been imported from another branch of the family to serve as a smokescreen while Hardy tells the truth even as he obscures it. We have already seen that Hardy's mother would have been as happy to remain in London as marry Thomas Hardy the elder, had the arrival of children not precipitated the marriage; what was there about her, or her family, which could be considered to "bemean" her husband? Her influence over her son was strong, her

1. Life, p. 214.

character powerful: more powerful, indeed, than that of her easy-going husband. While life for him consisted of an apparently leisurely application to his stone-mason's business, interrupted by still more leisurely dozing on the heath in the sun by day, and by night by the tapping of smugglers at the window of the little cottage and the customary tribute of a half of brandy,¹ Hardy's mother accepted their lot in a spirit of fatalism, seeing it as a series of pleasurable prospects from which humanity was hurled back by some malignant power.² Sometimes her understanding of life would be a puzzle to ~~the~~ boy. When he was six years old a man was hanged for murder: said his mother dogmatically: "The governess hanged him", and he wondered continually how a governess could hang an able-bodied man. From her, too, he learned the gentler legend of the animals kneeling on Christmas Eve,³ and she was an invaluable source of reminiscence, both of his own family and of the legends of the countryside. Her stern outlook on life does not seem to have spoiled her sense of fun, and even in old age, deliberately defying the protests of her more sedate daughters, she insisted on sitting by the side of the road and waving vigorously with her handkerchief as a party of her famous son's guests whirled in their carriages up the hill towards London. She planted very early in him the love of good books, presenting him with Dryden's Virgil, Rasselas, and Paul and Virginia. In his exploration of the home he came across a history of the

1. Beaminster, 20.

2. Notebooks, p. 32.

3. "It was, of course, his mother who told him the legend of the oxen kneeling in their stables at midnight on Christmas Eve"
— Florence Hardy to Lady Hoare, 7 January, 1916; Stourhead Papers, Wiltshire County Archives. By courtesy of Mr. H.P. R. Hoare and the National Trust.

Napoleonic wars, brightly and dramatically illustrated, a book which led his mind to the study of Napoleon, and which eventually found re-birth in The Trumpet-Major and The Dynasts. Still more important, her tales of local life and tragedy gave him a continuous source of inspiration, and the vivid rural legends she passed down to him became immortalised in the long sequence of the Wessex novels.

Whether she also taught him to read and write is uncertain. She was long believed to have done so, but Evelyn Hardy's publication of Hardy's letters from Julia Augusta Martin in 1955 showed that Mrs Martin may have taken at least some hand in this. Hardy was five years old when the Martins came to live at Kingston Maurward House, and he may well have been able to read by this time. If Mrs Martin took him further he owed her a double debt, for when he finally entered the village school at the age of six he was the first pupil to join the school endowed by his patroness. His learning there was presumably as good as he would have acquired at any other country school, but his parents may not have thought so, for a few years later, when he appeared to have overcome his childish frailty, he was sent to Isaac Last's day-school in Dorchester, much to Mrs Martin's disappointment. There seems to have been some estrangement between the Hardys and the Martins at this time, for "shortly before or after" Hardy's removal from the school -- in other words, not as a direct consequence of it -- the building work necessary for the Kingston estate was taken out of the hands of Hardy's father, who, either through bad feeling or loss of business, even considered leaving the area for good; a particularly rash

move for an established businessman whose home was secure for the duration of his lifetime. Just how such an estrangement was caused we cannot tell, but it was regretted by Julia ~~and~~ Augusta and by Hardy himself.¹ But although Mrs Martin was to remain in the parish for three more years, they did not meet again until Hardy was a young man.

Though he was reluctant to leave Bockhampton school, there is no doubt that in Isaac Last Hardy found a first-class schoolmaster, and Last's attention to his new pupil over the years that followed give the lie to any suggestion that Hardy was an uncouth, ill-lettered, peasant author. How much of his deeply-enquiring nature was already active when he came to Last's school we shall never know, but it would be surprising indeed if Last made no contribution to it, and he performed the most vital of a teacher's tasks in drawing out a native curiosity, and breathing in a lively spirit of criticism. In another Dorchester school the poet William Barnes performed the same task, as many of his pupils later testified, but Barnes's influence on Hardy, though very far from negligible, came too late to have planted the earliest seeds. Last recognised the aptness of his pupil, and began to teach him Latin, a subject outside the normal curriculum, though taught at times as an extra. For some the age of twelve would have seemed a late age to begin the study of the classics (though hardly later than that of a grammar school boy to-day), but in Dorchester Hardy was fortunate to have had the chance at all; the Grammar School was still far

1. Deacon and Coleman have an interesting discussion of the estrangement, Providence and Mr. Hardy, Ch. 20.

from reputable,¹ and all the other schools, perhaps forewarned by the obvious reluctance of local parents to support a strictly classical institution, were more concerned to teach the "practical" subjects of mathematics, geography, and perhaps history. A country education, related strictly to the countryman's needs, was what was now demanded, and that, for the most part, was what the budding citizens of Dorchester were given.

But in truth Hardy tells us little about his earlier academic prowess, and he was, with reason, more concerned to recall his emotional development. The pages of the Life recall the various childish loves which inspired him from time to time. He records in one instance, "he was more than a week getting over this desperate attachment." There would be little to remark in these boyish loves, were it not for the clarity with which his passions were recalled in later years, and for the fact that he deliberately omitted the most important instance from the biography. He remembered the features of the girls, and, as Edmund Blunden recalled,² "it was as though he could paint their portraits for himself, and house them quietly and gladly within his heart." The figures of Lizbie Brown, the daughter of a gamekeeper, and the farmer's daughter "Louisa in the Lane" were revived long after in his poems.³ Lizbie, older than himself, despised him; and the only words he ever heard from Louisa's lips

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1. In 1871 there were no boarders, few dayboys, and the Master derived an extra four hundred pounds per annum for the care of a lunatic patient. (Ministry of Education files).

2. Blunden, Thomas Hardy, pp. 11-12.

3. Louisa was Louisa Harding, of Stinsford and Dorchester, who died unmarried on September 12, 1813, aged 72. Her death was recorded in the Dorset County Chronicle of September 8, 1913, and she was buried the previous day at Stinsford. (see Stinsford registers).

were "good-night" one evening on the Stinsford road; later she gave him a shy smile, but that was all. The passing of these figures in their maturer years was like the passing of old friends, and the Life records "Louisa lies under a nameless mound in 'Mellstock' churchyard". So did little Fanny Hurd, the frail fellow-pupil from Bockhampton school, whose course seemed to end with her early death, but who returned to the sunlight in "Voices Growing From A Churchyard". Yet Hardy's preservation of these figures from his past could lead him into strange fantasies. His attachment to Julia Augusta Martin is admitted in the Life, but one remarkable passage of the manuscript was omitted, and shows how curiously Hardy came to regard his friendship for a woman thirty years his senior:

. . . though their eyes never met again after his call on her in London, nor their lips from the time when she had held him in her arms, who can say that both occurrences might not have been in the order of things, if he had developed their reacquaintance earlier, now that she was in her widowhood with nothing to hinder her mind from falling back upon the past.

Much of the reality of Hardy's life has been taken from us, and some has been wilfully kept back by the author himself. Yet there is still more than we have ever realised to be recaptured through the pages of the poems and the novels. The smallest incident could begin a train of thought which, though it lay buried for years, carried him forwards towards a rural tragic theme. Watching a drowned boy being taken from Shadwater Weir, he was convinced, by a curious trick of light, that it was the body of a girl. Many years afterwards he told Mrs Gertrude

Bugler that "it was this incident which started the train of thought which led him to write The Return of the Native."¹ Perhaps the writing of a single sentence -- "it was not, as he had expected, a woman, but a man"² -- found Thomas Hardy gazing back across the years to that moment of his youth.

His days were not, on the whole, difficult. He seems to have honoured both his parents, and the frailty which almost caused his death at birth rapidly disappeared as he grew older, and was banished entirely by the long and regular walks to and from his school at Dorchester. But he retained the childish sensitivity which at times made even the ordinary experiences of life an ordeal. Like the friend of his old age, T.E. Lawrence, he could not bear the touch of others -- "Hardy, how is it that you do not like us to touch you?" ~~xx~~ was the frank inquiry of a Dorchester playmate -- and to the end of his days he returned only the limpest and hastiest of handshakes. He would walk alone, frightened by the presences which haunted the dark lanes around Bockhampton, but nonetheless happy in his solitude; he would avoid human contact~~k~~ and find, with an introspective faculty perhaps dangerously beyond his years, sufficient refuge in his own thoughts and the sights and sounds of nature. As he grew to maturity and old age experience was to increase his wish to stand alone: at the personal level he would lose the gift of giving,³ and find, in the remembered circumstances

1. Beaminster, 1.

2. Return, V-ix.

3. In view of the great sympathy evident throughout Hardy's writing this statement may appear to be unfounded: but the pattern of his life did not always coincide with the ideals of his writing, and Hardy admitted as much. The letters of Hardy's two wives, and reports from Max Gate, support my view.

of his early life, a world of the past which, for all its broken promises, he would feel compelled to inhabit; perhaps the only world which ever had, for him, the truly hopeful prospect of serenity and achievement in life. Yet this youthful world, with the bitter experience it was to bring -- and perhaps because its promise was doomed to failure -- was the one world he concealed from others when he recalled his early life, the one world in which he was, habitually, at home.

What this world offered him was innocence, mental and emotional. And the first inroads into this childhood state were made when he entered formally into a career. One day, while restoring Woodsford Castle, six miles east of Dorchester, Hardy's father took the boy along to watch. Though the Young Hardy had no experience of architectural work except that gained by observation of his father's methods, the architect John Hicks decided to test him by inviting him to assist in a survey of the building. Hardy was obviously apt -- his powers of observation and of drawing inferences from observation were never weak -- and Hicks immediately offered to take him as a pupil. The expense of an apprenticeship was large, but Mrs Hardy, ever practical, pointed out that since her husband's practice was to pay cash the normal extended fees might be considerably reduced. Hicks was an easy man, with an open interest in his pupil, and offered to take Hardy for fifty pounds, instead of the usual hundred; when Mrs Hardy offered forty her terms were readily accepted.¹

1. The terms are quoted from the unpublished notes for the Life, referred to above. (Dorset County Museum).

Equally readily, stifling whatever ideas he might have had of entering the Church -- a possibility that had more than once occurred to him -- the boy entered the architect's office in South Street, Dorchester, and began his professional career.

Hardy, by his own admission, remained a bookworm, and in Hicks he found a master worthy of his tastes/. Hicks's father, a country rector, had been a classical scholar, and the architect himself possessed a smattering of Greek and Hebrew, though, says Hardy, "he was less at home in Latin". At all events, he left Hardy and his fellow-pupil Robert Bastow enough free time to follow their own courses, perhaps seeing in each of them something more than architectural promise. Hardy had learnt enough at school to wish to develop his own knowledge -- and what greater reward can a teacher ask for? -- and he continued to read Virgil, Horace, and Ovid in his spare time, as well as to embark on the totally fresh study of Greek. Home, school, and friends had all combined to make a scholar of him, and he repaid that interest in good earnest. If this is to be self-taught then Hardy was self-taught; for myself, I cannot see that the mental discipline required in a boy of sixteen to embark on such a course can be derived from any other source than the most strenuous cultivation of whatever natural talents the boy possessed. He had every reason to be grateful to his elders; and had he never achieved a later triumph they would have had every reason to be proud of the immediate result of their labours. Hicks himself,

though standing in a different relation to the boy, would enter into the labours of his pupils, excelling them in Greek, but often forced to confess his inferior ability in Latin. The architect's office must have presented an unusual face to the outside world when its master, "cornered and proved wrong", admitted that his apprentices were surpassing him in their knowledge of the classics. When there were doubts one or other of the apprentices would run next door to appeal to the judgement of William Barnes. It almost seemed that architecture was in second place.

The time spent in Hicks's office, however, had a more important outcome for the future novelist. Bastow, who had been bred a Baptist, introduced a note of controversy into Hardy's life, and may have planted the first seeds of a religious doubt that was never to disappear. His immediate impression on Hardy was just the reverse, for Hardy was always ready to give his admiration to anyone who seemed worthy of respect, and the young Bastow, fervently arguing the merits of adult baptism, had an influence which was strong enough to send Hardy to the local priest to discover whether he ought in conscience to be baptised again. The vicar recommended Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity as a better course than baptism -- an action which seems to have left Hardy more puzzled than the priest. But he decided, perhaps against his conscience, to hold to his High Church principles, and began to battle earnestly with his colleague, and later with the sons of the local Baptist

minister. Whether he out-debated Bastow or not, he found his match in the Perkins brothers who, armed with a knowledge of the Greek testament, could quote chapter and verse for their case, and, what was more, could quote it in the original. With a conscientiousness which perhaps seems strange to modern views, Hardy began his own study of the Greek texts, and found himself appalled at the apparent feebleness of argument which lay behind his opponents' views, and, one suspects, his own. The disputes soon died a natural death, but the lesson was not forgotten. If, as we may guess, he grew tired of religious debate, he never failed to remember that his beliefs stood in need of proof; nor, on the other hand, did he ever slight the sincerity and piety of the Perkins family. From them he acquired a taste for simple living which he never lost, and just as he gained a questioning spirit which was later to undermine his entire faith, so he gained an admiration for virtuous simplicity which he was later to regard as the most precious gift of true Christianity.

With Bastow's departure from his apprenticeship, first for London and later for Tasmania, Hardy was forced to apply himself more intensely to architecture than at any time hitherto. Though he was already stretching his wings as a poet,¹ he cannot have failed to enjoy the work in hand, for his sketching and surveying of old churches took him deep into the Dorsetshire countryside, and he began to know the fields and lanes of other areas as well as he had come to know his own. This had the immediate practical effect of counteracting the weakening results of long and private study, and in his own account of this period he draws attention to

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1. The early poem "Domicilium" was written before 1860.

the three modes of life which were normal to him at this time, "the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life, combined in the twenty-four hours of the day." In the early mornings he would study, by eight he would be plodding along the avenue to Dorchester, and in the evenings he would rush with his violin to play the country-dances at some rustic festival. It was an intense life, but varied, and it served his inner spirit as effectively as it maintained his health. A growing friendship with the Moule family at Fordington Rectory kept him in touch with some of the finest spirits ever to serve the Church in Dorset, and had the secondary effect of encouraging him to continue in his study of the classics; though eventually, when he requested their advice, they gave him the common-sense opinion that a fuller application to architecture would be of more value than the most detailed knowledge of the Greek tragedians.

By the time Hardy reached his twentieth year he had still no fully predetermined course before him. His earlier leanings toward the Church were still alive, and had been whetted, as well as potentially undermined, by religious debate. His apprenticeship as an architect was perhaps a logical outcome of his father's profession, yet his devotion to it, though adequate, was certainly not complete. His ambition as a poet was still in its infancy. Everything pointed to an undramatic but competent career as an architect, and the slow decline of his other interests. Yet at this stage the crucial influence of Horace Moule began to make itself felt.

It was Moule, a reviewer and a member of Queens' College, Cambridge, who had advised Hardy to abandon his study of the Greek tragedians a year or two before; now it was Moule again who introduced Hardy to the newly-published Essays and Reviews in 1860, and it may also have been through him that Hardy first came across Darwin's Origin of Species. Certainly both books were read by Hardy at this time, and both continued the undermining of his faith, although he was yet to make formal enquiries about the qualifications required for ordination.¹ Nonetheless, it eventually became clear to him that his beliefs could not be reconciled with the preaching of the Christian faith. The insistent demands for rational examination of the Biblical texts which had been put forward by the "Seven Against Christ" thus fell on ears already more than half prepared for their message; while the sombre evidence of Darwin made it impossible for Hardy to accept the Christian idea of a personal God. But there was no sudden break, and eventually the pressure of personal experience may have had as much to do with his ultimate denial of Christianity as the intellectual inquiry which began in 1860. Moule himself, and perhaps Moule's family, seem more than likely to have argued against the rejection of Christianity, and Hardy would be reluctant to ignore Moule's advice. Later

1. Dr. Elsie Smith, Librarian of the Cathedral Library at Salisbury, has stated that she has proof of Hardy's specific application for training for the clergy, and that Hardy was rejected on the grounds of his humble origin. Dr. Smith declined to name her source since it is her intention to publish it at a later date.

he was to send him analyses of style, and accepted that Moule would lecture him on his findings and his plans for writing,¹

These years, too, marked a change in Hardy's material fortunes. In 1862 his apprenticeship with Hicks was at an end, and though he remained with him for a while, living for the most part in Dorchester and visiting Bockhampton only at weekends, he soon began to consider moving further afield. He had visited London only once before, at the age of eight or nine, and he had no knowledge of the capital; but he now wished to advance further than was possible in a small country town, and on Thursday, April 17, 1862, he set out. He carried with him two letters of introduction, but was apparently not convinced of their value, for he bought a return ticket valid for six months, intending, if the worst should happen, to keep a clear line of retreat while his pocket still enabled him to do so; a trivial example, but showing that even as a young man the policy of planning for the least hopeful of several possible situations, set out in most of the novels, was important in Hardy's personal behaviour. In one instance Hardy thought his scepticism was justified, for on the first inquiry the gentleman "was civil . . . remembered his father, promised every assistance; and there the matter ended." However, the "gentleman" had very little time in which to act, for John Norton, practising as an architect in Old Bond Street, offered every kindness and even -- though

1. See, for example, Moule's letter of July 2, 1863 (Dorset County Museum), quoted in Providence and Mr. Hardy, p. 89.

he did not need assistance -- let Hardy earn a little money by preparing drawings for his office until some permanent opening should appear. Within a week, again thanks to Norton's generous recommendation, he had met Arthur Blomfield, who required a Gothic draughtsman to restore country churches and rectories, and by May 5 Hardy had found his niche in London. In the eyes of some his years in London were years of hardship and misery; there is no real evidence for this, and the ease with which he gained and kept his first appointment suggests that materially, at least, he was very fortunate. Nor had his spiritual life yet reached its crisis, though that was slowly approaching; and he seems, indeed, to have thrown himself into the new sights and sounds of a great, dirty, and still old-fashioned city with considerable enjoyment. His countryman's instincts were not yet offended by what he saw, nor his physical well-being undermined by the loss of country air.

He remained in London for five years, with only occasional visits to his home, and like five years in any man's life they were years of successes and reverses. From 1863 onwards he began to send his poetry to periodicals, and though each poem was returned unpublished, many of them were kept and only slightly altered for publication half a century later. These rebuffs may have injured him, for by 1865 he can write "The world does not despise us; it only neglects us",¹ but such a comment, while it accords with his feelings in later years, may be an inspiration of the mind rather than of the soul. For

1. Life, p. 48.

in that same year he was able to publish his light-hearted prose effort "How I Built Myself a House" in Chambers's Journal. As before, his life was a mixture, and Blomfield's office was scarcely more restrained than Hicks's. Blomfield himself was a tolerant and friendly employer, with a fund of anecdotes about his career and a blind eye to the misdemeanours of his staff. A short time after Hardy's arrival in London they moved to new offices in Adelphi Terrace, overlooking the Thames near Charing Cross, and found below them the members of the Radical Reform League. Though possessed of radical sympathies himself, Hardy was not afraid to satirise them, and pieces of paper bearing gently hostile messages would float down upon the members of the League as they entered the building. Eventually, unknown to Blomfield, Hardy and his colleagues were forced to apologise to the League secretary. But Blomfield tolerated the slow defacing of some fine Adam fireplaces, on which his employees would scribble caricatures, so the complaints of an irritated secretary might have meant little to him. Outside the office there was plenty to see: the Thames embankment was being built, and Charing Cross Bridge gradually stretching itself across the river; Dickens was still giving public readings, and on one occasion Hardy sat beside him in a coffee-shop and listened to him fussing about his bill;¹ there was dancing at Almack's, and the theatre and opera reached a standard quite unknown to Dorset. Hardy visited the Exhibition as frequently as possible, and spent many more hours in the reading room of the Kensington museum; his head

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1. Newman Flower, Just As It Happened, New York, 1950, pp. 88-9.

was read by a phrenologist, who gave an ominous report; and once, after gazing at it for weeks, Hardy saved enough to buy an ancient violin which he kept until his death.

Intellectually he continued to move forward. Still alive to the possibility of a future in the Church, he visited the Abbey frequently, and once, with Horace Moule, visited a Roman Catholic Church service which he found beautiful and moving. He still read at every available moment, including the classics once more in his personal curriculum, and he enrolled himself at King's College, London, though his close reading of English literature, and particularly of English poetry, could have left him little time for the study of French for which he had enrolled. And his mind was one day cast back to his childhood reading of Napoleonic history when he visited the House of Commons and heard one of the last speeches of Lord Palmerston. A few weeks later the old statesman was dead, and Hardy watched the burial from a seat high up in Westminster Abbey.

Even in the great city there were elements of the grotesque. The gradual extension of the railways meant the destruction of several old burial-grounds, and more than once Blomfield had been called upon to supervise the removal of the bodies for burial elsewhere. Once, before Hardy's arrival, the bodies had been taken from their places, but never, so far as Blomfield could discover, re-interred elsewhere. There were rumours of bones being taken to the bone-mills, which brought the grim remark from Blomfield, "I believe those people are all ground up!" Hardy himself, working by night to avoid disturbance, supervised on later occasions, and

watched the older coffins fall apart as they were brought to the surface. From one fell a skeleton with two skulls, and the watchers drew their own macabre conclusions. At home, and in more conventional surroundings, Blomfield ran a choir, enlisting Hardy's aid; and even, at a later date, allowed Hardy to lecture to his fellow-architects on English literature and poetry. On his side, Hardy seems to have been an able assistant: able enough, at least, to win a medal for an architectural essay -- though the judges may have considered its style more impressive than its content.¹

Of romance he tells us little, though with his temperament he must have been fired with more than one temporary passion. That it was on his mind is certain: no young bachelor lives for five years in London without the wish, at least, to form some lasting attachment, and certainly not a bachelor who has proposed and been rejected at the age of 22.² On his twenty-fifth birthday, feeling a little dejected and older than he was, he wrote "wondered what woman, if any, I should be thinking about in five years time." He was soon to know.

1. There has been some searching for this essay, but since its title is unknown the prospect of discovering it seems remote. The proceedings of the Royal Institute of British Architects for May 4, 1863, record an award to Hardy, but do not cite the essay by name, nor is there a mention of any monetary prize. It is also clear that an essay on "The Application of Moulded, Shaped, or Coloured Bricks, or Terra-cotta, to Modern Architecture" was set for 1864, and was consequently not, as has been stated, the one for which Hardy's award was made.

2. In 1862 Hardy proposed to a girl named Mary Waight, daughter of a printer and bookseller of Dorchester. (Beaminster, 11).

II

Too fragrant was Life's early bloom,
Too tart the fruit it brought!

C.P. 201.

Five years in London slowly sapped Hardy's strength; feeling mentally and physically exhausted, he was glad to accept Blomfield's suggestion that he should leave the city for a while, and in July 1867 he returned to Dorset. His relatives were shocked by the change in his appearance, though a few weeks in the countryside were enough to restore his vigour. Yet his term in London had not been unproductive. His architectural progress had been satisfactory, he had seen a style of life unknown to Dorset, he had kept in touch with the progress of science through his continued visits to museums and exhibitions of South Kensington, and had read there to keep abreast of modern knowledge: above all, he had taken his first steps as a poet. From London he brought a collection of manuscripts, most of them afterwards destroyed but some preserved and published many years later, when a tardy recognition of his poetic gift was at last within his grasp.

Most of the surviving poems are not of a very high order, and even one that was ultimately published was labelled in the final manuscript "To be thrown out".¹ Yet this very poem is remarkable for the distinctly personal style in which it was written:

'Thwart my wistful way did a damsel saunter,
Fair, albeit unformed to be all-eclipsing;

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1. C.P. 5.

"Maiden meet", ^{held} ~~quoth~~ I, "till arise my forefelt
Wonder of women."

The distorted syntax, the mixture of dialect, archaic, and common English, and the occasional coinages which mark this poem were never to disappear, though their relative proportions might be varied. Others of this early group show only one clear influence: the oppressive influence of Shakespeare's sonnets. Yet the quality of his verse at this stage matters little: for him they were his first attempts to find a distinctive personal voice, and seen in this light they reveal a considerable measure of success, the personal idiom triumphing over Hardy's borrowings.

For the moment, however, their value for us is of another kind, for they reveal some of Hardy's preoccupations at this time. Without setting aside his frequently repeated warning that many of the poems are dramatic, even where they appear to be personal, it is possible to distinguish certain patterns of his thought which were to become permanent features of his poetry. The first thing we discover is that Hardy's disillusion with life is already setting in. Some have a facile quality which might suggest that they are derived as much from the spirit of the times as from personal experience, but others suggest that all the time personal experience is pushing the author towards a fuller acceptance of the spirit of inquiry and doubt which was widespread, and which any avid follower of the discussion of religion and the Darwinian theory could not have failed to avoid. There is the very marked power of "Hap",¹ for instance, which suggests more than a young man's reading; while the "Young Man's

1. C.P. 7.

Epigram on Existence"¹ is no more than a youthful exercise in disillusion. Seen alone the "Epigram" would have no significance whatever; seen as part of the total product of Hardy's career it indicates that he formed his impressions early, and that he either failed to develop intellectually, or experience confirmed his early disillusion.

Some of the disillusion may have been a natural reaction to life in London. Not long before leaving the capital he had toyed with the idea of writing blank verse dramas, and had approached stage circles in the hope of practical experience, even appearing in the pantomime The Forty Thieves. But, as he says, "the first moment of his sight of stage realities disinclined him to push further in that direction,"² and he appears to have felt distaste for what he saw. A poem which remained unpublished until June 1966³ would appear to date from this time, and reveals the same attitude, though it also possesses detachment and compassion:

A VICTORIAN REHEARSAL

A single shine broods gloomily
Where footlight flares are wont to be;
The stalls are swathed in holland shrouds,
Imaging lifeless first-night dowds;
The scene-cloths sway each feeble while
Like fusty banners in an aisle;
A Daylight arrow shoots down through
Some inlet, of a steely blue,
Dappling at minutes the rehearsings,
Mutterings, crossings, and reversings,
Done by a queer little group dull-dressed,
As 'twere some children's game unguessed;
Town-dwellers who affect them clowns,
Or villains fierce with oaths and frowns:

1. C.P. 281.

2. Life, p. 54.

3. Times Literary Supplement, June 2, 1966.

Among them being the leading lady,
 Whose private life is whispered shady,
 But who's to divorce her spouse, they say,
 Adding, "it should be the other way";
 Yet haggarded, in the morning light,
 By too-late houring overnight,
 In frowzed fur jacket, donned in haste,
 A sweetheart not to every taste.

So much for what the gossips tell,
 Truly, or liker falsely. -- Well,
 Anyhow, here are throbbing natures,
 Arrived to take feigned nomenclatures,
 Unheeding what warm complications
 May issue from new, forced relations,
 Wherein may lie more tragedy
 Than in the play the town's to see.

One would like to know more about the occasions on which Hardy visited the theatre in his self-appointed role of observer, and one would like to know more about his other experiences in London, in particular the experiences shared with Horace Moule.¹ Yet the details seem to have been lost for ever, and perhaps the most that we can say is that a natural melancholy had been reinforced by experience, but had not yet been turned into incipient bitterness.

Two preoccupations emerge clearly from the early poems: ambition, and love. Both are natural enough for a young man, and it is not surprising that Hardy sometimes treats the two themes as in conflict with each other. Nor, given the gradual bent of his thought, is it surprising that these themes are set against the background of a potentially hostile universe, which subdues human frames to limitations which set a frost on heroism and worth.²

1. There is evidence, some of it possessed by Professor Purdy, that Moule's bachelor life was by no means blameless, and Hardy's "Confession To A Friend in Trouble" may reflect this.

2. C.P. 789.

What is surprising is that several of the poems appear to be addressed to a specific person, and the situation of that person is in each case the same. We may especially point to "In Vision I Roamed", "From Her In The Country", and "The Musing Maiden",¹ though there are others which correspond in theme, even if they are less explicitly personal. "From Her In The Country" merely expresses a maiden's envy that her lover is in London, and her own discontent with the sights and sounds of the countryside, a mood which has much in common with Eustacia Vye's feelings for Budmouth or Paris; "The Musing Maiden" refers directly to the hog-backed Downs of Dorset, and the steamers puffing their way up-channel towards London. These poems could be, certainly, merely "personative and dramatic", but they coincide exactly with Hardy's emotional career. On Hardy's return to Dorset in 1867 he became engaged to his cousin, Tryphena Sparks of Puddletown, despite the fact that she was only sixteen, eleven years younger than Hardy himself. The character of Tryphena is now, of course, extremely difficult to assess, but there can be little doubt that she was strong-willed, talented, and probably capricious. The surviving photographs of her² show a woman of good carriage, mobile features, capable of varying degrees of attractiveness, and at times of a very real beauty. That a large number of Hardy heroines owe something to her seems virtually certain, and Fancy Day of Under the Greenwood Tree and Sue Bridehead [ital.] of Jude the Obscure may well be detailed portraits. Her influence on Hardy's work and personality was considerable. Yet the fact remains that their engagement -- whether a formal engagement or merely an understanding -- failed,

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1. C.P. 7, 217, and 861 respectively.

2. See accompanying file of documentary material, Items II-IV.

and it appears probable that a high degree of rashness marked its career. Tryphena appears to have borne Hardy's child; and the tragic issues of their liaison marked Hardy for the rest of his life. There are still so many problems involved, and the episode has such vital relevance to Hardy's work, that a review of the evidence seems essential.

Of the fact of the engagement, made public by Miss Lois Deacon,¹ there can be little doubt. The evidence is derived principally from Tryphena's daughter, Mrs Eleanor Tryphena Bromell (1878-1965), whose letters and recollections written between 1959 and her death repeat that Hardy and Tryphena were engaged, and that the engagement began after Hardy's return from London in 1867. It was continued during Tryphena's training at Stockwell College, South London, and during her first years as headmistress of the Girls' Section of the Coburg Street School, Plymouth:

When she came out of college, 1871, & went to Plymouth, Tom gave her a ring. He was "tacking after her" while she was in college, & he in London training for architect.

(Mrs Bromell's Recollections)²

The detail of the ring was later corroborated by Miss Irene Cooper Willis, co-executor of the Hardy estate, who had been told by Florence Hardy that the ring given to Hardy's first wife had been intended for a Dorset girl.³ This is one indication that, despite her age, Mrs Bromell's memories of her mother's conversations were reliable. It is also true that when she was questioned about Tryphena's childhood home at Puddletown, which she had never seen, her description of it was accurate, again

1. Beaminster 3, and Providence and Mr. Hardy.
2. See Bibliography for details of sources at this point.
3. Beaminster 3, pp. 18-19.

suggesting that her memory was reliable.

In Mrs Bromell's possession was an album of photographs, formerly the property of Tryphena. The most interesting of its contents was the portrait of an unidentified young boy.¹ Mrs Bromell was first shown this photograph by Lois Deacon (accompanied by one of her literary trustees) on September 9, 1960 -- i.e. four-and-a-half years before her death. Mrs Bromell did not at that time give a conclusive identification of the child: in answer to Lois Deacon's question "Who is that?" she replied "Oh, that's just a little boy who used to come to see Tryphena in Plymouth". She volunteered no name for the child, and no background; but clearly any identification of the photograph has to take account of this statement, made when Mrs Bromell was clearly in command of her faculties. In her last years, and especially in her last months (when she was 86) she was weak, and sometimes confused. Thus her statements at this time must be treated with caution. Yet she could accurately identify photographs of the young Hardy and of Tryphena as a girl, and her memory seemed generally unimpaired. She was not, however, again shown the photograph of the child until she was visibly weakening, sick, and a hospital patient. When she did see the photograph her responses to it were checked by her ability to identify photographs of Hardy and Tryphena. Lois Deacon's account, written a few days before the event, explains the procedure:

. . . I propose to take with me the picture of Tryphena aged eighteen, and of Tom . . . to find out, first of all, whether she still recognises them. Then [a member of the family] would quietly

1. See accompanying file, Item ~~III~~ IX.

place before Nellie [Mrs Bromell] the picture of "the small boy", explaining that it was from Tryphena's album, and asking N.T. who this was. 1.

This was done for the first time on January 17, 1965. Mrs Bromell stated several times "That was Hardy's boy", "Everyone knew it was Hardy's boy", but she did not know his Christian name, nor did she know the identity of the boy's mother. She described him as "delicate", "frail", older than herself, fond of birds, of reading poetry, and of drawing. She also said that he had hurt his hand in a bicycle accident (later she said that it had been scratched by a dog), but she could not say how old he had been when this took place. The portrait of the small boy shows no sign of that injury.

Mrs Bromell went on to say that the boy had attended Tryphena's funeral, but had never revisited the Gales at Topsham after that. Until then, she said, "he came to see Tryphena". Charles Frederick Gale, Tryphena's husband, "did not like the boy". It is perhaps important to state here that several members of the family were present, and Mrs Bromell's daughter asked for the photograph to be produced a second time for the old lady's inspection. The presence of the family, and their clear concern for their mother's welfare, seem a sufficient guaranteed against undue pressure on an old and weakened lady; and Miss Deacon's transcripts, together with the letters written to her at this time by Mrs Bromell's relatives, make it clear that not only was no such pressure contemplated, but that no statement was accepted unless it had been witnessed by members of the family.

A further interview in which the same standard of care was shown, was held during the following month (February 8, 1965). Shortly before her guests arrived Mrs Bromell

1. Lois Deacon to Terry Coleman, January 14, 1965.

had been sufficiently clear in her mind to discuss Hardy's novels with her nurse, and the nurse commented on this before the interview began. The same set of photographs was then produced by Miss Deacon, together with one other, the photograph of a young man aged twenty or twenty-one. This, too, was from Tryphena's album. Miss Deacon also carried with her an autograph album, presented to Tryphena by her pupils on the occasion of her marriage. Two of the pages were decorated with pressed fern leaves and wild flower leaves, arranged in a circlet, and at the centre of the circlet on each page were written the words "He will be our Guide, even unto Death". At the foot of each of these pages was the inscription, apparently in Tryphena's hand:

Ry.
Decr. 1873.

This, too, was eventually shown to Mrs Bromell.

Again the young boy was identified as "Hardy's son". On one occasion Mrs Bromell said "Hardy's nephew", but immediately corrected her own words, saying "Hardy's son . . . I always took it to be Hardy's son . . . He came to see Tryphena". When shown the autograph album Mrs Bromell said that the ferns had been picked by her brother, Charlie, and she repeated the statement. Presumably, however, the date in the album, 1873, refers to the day on which the ferns had been plucked; Charles Gale the younger was born in 1880, and it is clear that Mrs Bromell's replies are improbable at this point. Miss Deacon then turned to the other photographs, but Mrs Bromell gave no clear indication that the small boy and the young man were the same person, as Miss Deacon had assumed. She did, however, look at the right hand of the young man, and remarked spontaneously "He hurt his hand". On a subsequent

occasion she said that he was "Hardy's boy grown up" -- though in this instance Lois Deacon recorded that it was impossible to be fully sure of her statement, since she was visibly tired and confused.

At this point of the discussion it is necessary to assess Mrs Bromell's reliability once more. Most of the information concerning only Hardy and Tryphena came during the preceding five years. Although Mrs Bromell recognised the photograph of the child as early as 1960 ("a little boy who came to see Tryphena"), her precise identification of him came only while she was on her deathbed. And it certainly looks as if there was some confusion in her mind. The statement about the ferns appears, at least, to be nonsense: flowers cannot be picked by a child who is not yet alive. Were Mrs Bromell's statements nonsense throughout? Is there any evidence that the young man had indeed hurt his hand? -- for if so, Mrs Bromell's mental powers were clear at this point, and we have reasonable grounds for assuming that the two portraits are of the same person.

The photograph of the young man is not clear,¹ especially because the right hand is shielded by the left, and the casual observer might well be shy of forming an opinion. The photograph was therefore subjected to inspection by two competent medical authorities, Dr. Rune Wikström, Director of Mösseberg Sanatorium, Sweden, and Dr. Y. Raekallio, Professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Turku, Finland. Their inspections took place independently of each other, and their conclusions, concisely stated by Professor Raekallio, were identical:

It is impossible to be sure, but it could be that some of the fingers of the right hand are missing. This is a guess, but something seems to be wrong. 2.

1. See accompanying file, Item X.

2. Statement to F.R.Southerington 1 October 22, 1967.

Neither Dr. Wikström nor Professor Raekallio had been asked to comment on the hand. The question put to them was simply "In your opinion does this photograph show evidence that this man had ever suffered an injury?" The only injury suggested by either doctor was an injury to the right hand.

Mrs Bromell turned again, voluntarily, to the portrait of the boy, and the conversation ran as follows:

Lois Deacon: The boy was some years older than you?
Mrs Bromell: Yes, he was older than me . . . That was Rantie . . . R.A.N.T.I.E., Ranty, Randy. . . . It could be short for Randolph This in response to a suggestion . . . He was a Sparks. He was in Bristol most of the time. That's where he lived.

According to Mrs Bromell's subsequent statements, "Randy" had been brought up at Plymouth by Mrs Rebecca Paine, Tryphena's sister, and later lived at Bristol in the home of Nathaniel Sparks, Tryphena's brother. She stated that he had been trained as an architect, but in a later interview with Lois Deacon alone she said that he had helped Nathaniel Sparks, who was a violin-maker, and that his job had been to assist with the accounts.

We can be sure that Randy, whoever he was, existed: Mrs Bromell's grand-daughter subsequently remarked that she had heard her grandmother talk of Randy before, but had not known who he was. Mrs Bromell had merely said, "I once knew a Randy". In a final interview, on February 10, 1965, Mrs Bromell explained that the name was an abbreviated form of "Randall".

Mrs Bromell died on February 24, 1965.

This, in brief, is the principal evidence that Hardy was the father of a child. Providence and Mr. Hardy adduces several literary parallels, which the authors believe to be

biographical allusions, and many of them are persuasive. The connection between Tryphena and Jude the Obscure is especially important: Hardy's preface states that the book was partly occasioned by the death of a woman in 1890 (the year of Tryphena's death), and the cousin-relationship between Jude and Sue Bridehead parallels the relationship between Hardy and Tryphena. There is also considerable ~~xxxxxxxx~~ ^{internal} evidence that Hardy was preoccupied with personal and autobiographical concerns as he wrote this work. Leaving literary parallels aside, however, the evidence would still appear to be strong. Mrs Bromell did not know who the boy's mother was, certainly, but the photograph was in Tryphena's album. She was certain that Hardy was the boy's father, and she produced, without pressure, a name which corresponds to the "Ry." of Tryphena's autograph album. She did not say that Randy had picked the pressed ferns, but she produced an impossible alternative candidate. She produced information about the child's upbringing, tastes, and physique, and mentioned an injury which would appear, on the evidence of independent medical testimony, to correspond with another of Tryphena's photographs and to her comment. This outside testimony is the strongest link between the two portraits (it was of the small boy that she first said "he hurt his hand"). Moreover, she came very close to identifying Tryphena as the mother when she admitted that "he was a Sparks". None of the information volunteered during that last phase of her life conflicts with her comment on the photograph in 1960. If what she said is not true then we are faced with what seems a more incredible alternative: that Mrs Bromell, old, sick, and knowing that she was nearing the end of her life, invented a non-existent person, gave him a non-existent name, foisted him on to Thomas Hardy. A further

alternative, that she confused a non-existent Randy with another, actual, child of the family, seems unlikely since no living member ^{is} able to recall a child who might fit the photograph and the inscription in the autograph album. The one alternative raised by Mrs Bromell herself ("Charlie") seems clearly impossible.

Did Mrs Bromell give any indication that Tryphena was the mother, over and above the vague statement that "he was a Sparks?" The answer is that she did. An early indication may, with the benefit of hindsight, be judged to have appeared in a letter written to Lois Deacon on August 11, 1960, four-and-a-half years before Mrs Bromell's death. After commending Lois Deacon for having "done 'yeoman service' in probing all the past events you have found", Mrs Bromell stated that there was still something which Lois Deacon had not yet discovered. She gave no clue as to what this might be, but it could certainly not have been the pattern of illegitimacy which Miss Deacon believed she had traced in the generations preceding Tryphena's birth: only two months later, on October 11, 1960, Mrs Bromell wrote in strong terms reacting against the very idea of illegitimacy in the earlier branches of the family. It seems reasonable to believe that what Lois Deacon had failed to discover was the existence of Randy; it also seems possible -- no more -- that Mrs Bromell may have had a suspicion, though no knowledge, of her mother's involvement. For in an interview on Christmas Day, 1964, she said repeatedly, and with visible and understandable distress, "Hardy loved her, but they said she was a whore"[sic]. Miss Deacon was shocked and distressed by what she thought she had heard, and asked for corroboration from a member of the family; it was con-

firmed that Mrs Bromell's words were as they are quoted here. She subsequently added, "They said ~~that~~ she ran around with other men". These two remarks not only point to the probability that Tryphena was indeed the mother of Hardy's child, but they also answer one of the principal criticisms to be directed against this case.

For it is a fact that no-one in Puddletown, either members of families distantly connected with the Hardys, or the older inhabitants, can recall hearing any kind of scandal, or gossip about a scandal, in the 1860's. Of course no contemporaries are now alive, but scandals tend to live on in Dorset villages long after the principal actors have died. And members of the family do have knowledge of family affairs which took place before their birth, and have given me information on that basis. Mr. John Antell, a descendant of Hardy's mother's sister, is a valuable source of information, and states vigorously that he has no reason to believe in the existence of a Hardy child, and has heard no legends or rumours about it. Nonetheless, Mrs Bromell's remarks suggest that there had been gossip.

Two other points suggest that this is correct. As long ago as 1940 an American scholar, Professor Harold Hoffman, visiting England for an investigation into Hardy's life, spent some time at Puddletown. His contact with Mrs Bromell came very late -- indeed too late for him to talk to her -- but before this he came across traces of a Puddletown girl related to Hardy who had been baptised as the daughter of her actual grandmother and the sister of her actual mother. This is precisely the pattern which Miss Deacon believes she has found, and which was outlined in Providence and Mr. Hardy: she claims that Tryphena, although baptised as the daughter of Maria (Hand) Spakks, was in fact the

daughter of her "elder sister", Rebecca Sparks. It is striking, to say the least, that two independent investigators, separated by a period of twenty years, should nonetheless both present the same hypothesis. Miss Deacon's reasoning has been presented in her published work; we are not so fortunate with Harold Hoffman. He died in 1940, shortly after his return to the United States, and no efforts to trace his papers have yet proved successful. But since nothing appears in the local records to justify his theory one can only assume that he was working on the basis of local gossip. Certainly such cases of concealed illegitimacy are common, even to-day. Public records may help, but they are not always more reliable than local knowledge, and sometimes they are considerably less so.

This, of course, is not evidence that gossip existed to state that Tryphena had borne a child, still less that she had borne Hardy's child. It does suggest that Tryphena was the subject of gossip; only the application of circumstantial details outlined above enables us to suggest the exact nature of that gossip. One further indication that Tryphena was in trouble must also be taken into account.

Lois Deacon maintained, purely on the basis of her reading of the poems, that the most likely date for Randal's birth was the summer of 1868. One small detail that contributed to this guess was Hardy's reference¹ to a lost poem written in February, 1868, entitled "A Departure by Train". In August, 1967, I received permission from the headmaster of Puddletown school to study the school log for the 1860's, and with the headmaster's generous assistance found that from November 7, 1866, until January, 1868, Tryphena Sparks was employed as a pupil-teacher at Puddletown school. There are several references to her work, and it

1. Life, p. 57.

seems to have been satisfactory until 1868, when we find

Reproved pupil-teacher for neglect of duty -- parents very angry in consequence -- determined to withdraw her a month hence.

In fact Tryphena appears to have left the school at once, for on January 20 we read:

Change of teachers. Frances Dunman being appointed P.T. in Tryphena Sparks's place.

On the same day the log book for the boys' section of the school records that Tryphena was transferred there, but she does not appear in the records after that date. If she did remain for a further month there is no record of her dismissal during February. Nor, beyond "neglect of duty" and the anger of parents, is any reason for her dismissal specified. Set against her steady work during the previous months, and her later career as a highly competent headmistress, this looks very odd. Stranger still is that on January 22, 1868, just two days ~~before~~ ^{after} Tryphena's removal from the girls' section, the headmistress "explained fully to 1st and 2nd classes the 7th commandment . . ." "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is unusual fare for a group of young girls in the 1860's (although there are some other recorded instances). The timing of the headmistress's explanation is suggestive, as also is the original decision to remove her to the boys' section: if she had been guilty of neglect of duties among the girls why should she be more energetic among the boys? On the other hand, the boys might be less vulnerable to any dangerous moral example which Tryphena might have presented.

Taking all these details together, the evidence for a child of Tryphena and Hardy is persuasive. Moreover, Mrs Bromell had one further word on the subject, not recorded in the published transcript of the interview of November 1, 1962.¹ In the presence of Tryphena's daughter and Lois

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1. See Beaminster, 3, pp. 26-30.

Deacon, Mr. J. Stevens Cox put a direct question to Mrs Bromell: "Did Hardy and Tryphena have a child?"

Mrs Bromell: I've told you quite enough. We are not going to wash all our dirty linen in public. You know too much already.

JSC: Of course, of course, but can you say they didn't have a child?

Mrs Bromell: No, I won't say that.

Even accepting, however, that the evidence is persuasive, it is also true that to this date no details of the child's subsequent career have been found. No certificates of birth, marriage, or death; no details of his working life, no details of his whereabouts after his removal from Plymouth to Nathaniel Sparks's Bristol home. The reason for this is not difficult to seek; but ~~the~~ lack of this evidence imposes a large burden of documentary proof on those who believe Mrs Bromell's statements to have been true.

The principal difficulty is that there appear to be no records of any child called Randal Sparks. This would, at first sight, appear to be the most likely name for him to have borne, and Mrs Bromell herself said "He was a Sparks". Nonetheless, it may be that his name was not Sparks, but Paine (perhaps spelt 'Pain' or 'Payne').

On Christmas Day, 1872, Rebecca Sparks, a spinster of full age, was married in Puddletown Church to Frederick Paine, a saddler of Puddletown parish.¹ Mrs Bromell told Lois Deacon that Rebecca and Frederick had been "going around together" for several years, and indeed one hopes so, for Frederick Paine saw very little of his wife once the ceremony was over. Tryphena was a witness to her sister's wedding, and on her return to Plymouth to resume her duties as head-mistress she was accompanied by the newly-wed Mrs Paine,

1. See copy certificate, Item XIV of the accompanying file.

who helped her as her housekeeper, and eventually joined the school staff as needlework mistress. Mrs Paine, in fact, appears to have been a wife in name only. We have Mrs Bromell's word for it that it was she, and not Tryphena, who looked after Randal while he lived in Plymouth. If this is indeed so -- and again the alternative is that Mrs Bromell invented the story -- Randal could only have passed as Rebecca's son, and would presumably have taken her name: Tryphena was still single, and a headmistress. It is inconceivable that she could have publicly acknowledged her child. Nor is there any other convincing reason for Rebecca's peculiar marriage and her arrival at Plymouth. Mrs Bromell, it is true, apparently saw nothing strange in this abrupt abandonment of a husband:

It was rather hard on him, perhaps, but they were going about together for several years before they were married I know, and then Tryphena was left by herself in a house in Plymouth . . . so of course their mother being dead she took pity on her and came to look after her. 1.

The notion that a woman would abandon her husband so soon, simply to become her sister's housekeeper, seems unbelievable. Rebecca never returned to Frederick Paine, remaining in the Gale household after Tryphena's marriage, and dying there. All that the husband got from the marriage was sixteen pounds, the remaining value of Rebecca's Post Office Book at the time of her death.

If all these details contribute to the probability of Mrs Bromell's statements, so do some of the poems, most particularly "On A Heath" and "A Place On The Map"², which

1. Mrs Bromell to Lois Deacon, February 18, 1960.
2. C.P. 441 and 302 respectively.

appear to refer to a pregnancy. These should be read in conjunction with Lois Deacon's discussion of Hardy's replies to Vere H. Collins.¹ "On A Heath" concludes:

There was another looming
 Whose life we did not see;
 There was one stilly blooming
 Full nigh to where walked we;
 There was a shade entombing
 All that was bright of me.

Vere Collins questioned Hardy on this stanza:

- C. Who or what is it that is referred to in the last stanza.
 H. There is a third person.
 C. 'Another looming', 'one stilly blooming', 'A shade entombing' -- are there not three different things?
 H. No, only one.

It is difficult, with Mrs Bromell's evidence to hand, to read this poem, or "The Place On The Map", without the conviction that they refer to Tryphena's pregnancy.

There are, of course, a large number of poems which refer directly or indirectly to Hardy's love for Tryphena. But the present argument has attempted to avoid drawing upon literary sources for evidence. Primarily these conclusions rest on the memories of an old lady of events which took place before her birth and which were repeated to her in childhood (Tryphena died when Mrs Bromell was only in her twelfth year). Some would claim that they are therefore unreliable. I would make the opposite claim. No-one familiar with the conversations of the very old can fail to be struck by the fact that their recollections of childhood are more reliable and vivid than their recollections of yesterday. Even in advanced old age the memories of the far-distant past are often recalled vividly and distinctly. There is no doubt about Mrs Bromell's lucidity over most of the five-and-a-half years in which

1. op.cit., pp. 184-6.

she gave her evidence, and the checks made upon her state of mind as she lay on her death-bed seem to me to have been adequate and responsible. At the time Lois Deacon received praise and encouragement from the family, who believed that her conversations with the old lady were beneficial rather than disturbing. There is no doubt that Mrs Bromell was in a position to gather the evidence. She had strong and affectionate memories of her mother, and further information was provided by her father. She also stated once that Nathaniel Sparks was an even more important source of information: she lived in his home while a student, and he had, according to her, looked after Randal after Tryphena's marriage. ~~xxxxxx~~ Randal would have been, moreover, her own halfbrother. It is also very difficult to dismiss information which corresponds so well with Hardy's literary preoccupations, especially when a number of the details can be confirmed from other sources. On most occasions when Mrs Bromell made a statement capable of outside confirmation (as, for example, the description of Tryphena's Puddletown home, already referred to) her statements were found to be correct. Where she is incorrect (as, for example, her statement that Hardy was training as an architect in London, when he was actually practising there) the error is usually slight and understandable. The principal discrepancy, the naming of her brother Charlie as the gatherer of the pressed ferns, is much more serious; but, as we have seen, she remembered another significant detail, the injury to the hand, even though it is not obvious in the photograph, and must have been still less obvious to her weakened eyes. This detail was not even taken wholly seriously as evidence, until later confirmed by qualified and independent testimony.

There is one essential difference between the case outlined above and the other claims made in Providence and

Mr. Hardy: they are very often the result of Miss Deacon's hypotheses, whereas the case fo Randal's existence does not depend primarily upon hypothesis but upon Mrs Bromell. There are additions, certainly: as we have seen, Mrs Bromell did not say that Tryphena was the mother of the child. Nonetheless, all the circumstances point to this conclusion, whether those circumstances consist of literary parallels or allusions, or of events which we know to have taken place in the 1860's. In other words, this case is based upon conjecture to only a limited degree. If Mrs Bromell's evidence is discounted as pure gossip, it is surely remarkable that she should have produced such gossip about a mother whose memory she genuinely loved. If it is discounted as the ramblings of a confused and dying woman, then those ramblings are remarkably consistent. If they were invented, for whatever reason, then we must presuppose in Mrs Bromell a knowledge of Hardy's works so detailed that a story could be produced, fitted to existing photographs and verifiable recollections, and still remain consistent with Hardy's literary preoccupations. I do not believe any of these verdicts is ~~even~~ remotely tenable. Despite much work remaining to be done, I am convinced that Hardy had a son, that Tryphena was the mother, and that the photographs adduced as evidence are genuine portraits of the child.

Providence and Mr. Hardy suggests, however, that Tryphena was illegitimate, that Rebecca Sparks was her mother, and that because Rebecca herself was Hardy's illegitimate sister, Tryphena was in fact his niece. (This confusing pattern of relationships may become clearer by reference to the pedigree included in Item XVII of the accompanying file of documentary material). Hardy's child would thus be the offspring of an incestuous union. If this were correct it would certainly explain what Providence

had "done to Mr. Hardy", but the difficulty of proving that it is correct is enormous,

Initially, all the evidence is against it, Documentary records, as Miss Deacon acknowledges, help little here: but this is a point against her view, not merely a neutral statement of fact. For it is not true that the local records contain nondocumentation of incest and illegitimacy. If one confines one's search to the parish records of areas which Hardy could have known, and which, given his interest in his own pedigree, he almost certainly did know -- one finds numerous cases of illegitimacy on record, some cases of incest, and a considerable number of cousin-marriages.¹ Such records of the unconventional are continued until very late in the nineteenth century, and it is only with the approach of the twentieth that a modern reticence creeps in. It is true that the earlier records are sometimes inconsistently or sporadically maintained, but had there been three generations of illegitimacy, culminating in an incestuous relationship, it is surprising that no trace at all should appear. Tryphena's own illegitimacy seems the most difficult to prove: the case rests primarily on the fact that at the time of Tryphena's birth, Maria Sparks, officially the mother, was yet able to travel to Dorchester and back only six days after the birth of the child. It is also stressed that eight years had passed between the birth of Nathaniel and that of his sister Tryphena. To take the latter point first, it is equally true that there are other similar gaps in the family, and there is also a period of ten years between the birth of Hardy's sister Mary and his brother Henry. This point leads us nowhere.

1. I have in mind principally the records of Melbury, Puddletown, Owermoigne, and Stinsford in Dorset, and of Fawley and Chaddleworth, both in Berkshire.

Similarly, it is a fact that a large number of Hardy and Hand women gave birth to children in their forties, apparently without ill effects, and it was unnecessary for any of them to travel to Dorchester to register the birth since John Cox, the registrar, travelled from parish to parish with a horse and trap, registering births and deaths as he went.¹ Indeed, every local record points to the complete legitimacy of Tryphena.

This said, Mis Deacon's views cannot be pushed aside. Although there is no official record of illegitimacy, it is possible that Hardy himself knew Tryphena's birth to be irregular. For Harold Hoffman, on his visit to Puddletown in 1940, came across traces of a girl related to Hardy who had been baptised as the daughter of her actual grandmother and the sister of her actual mother, and he eventually traced the girl's name as Tryphena Sparks.² This is the pattern which Miss Deacon traced without a knowledge of Hoffman's work, and it is striking that two independent investigators, separated by twenty years, should both present the same hypothesis. Since nothing appears in the records one can only assume that Hoffman derived his information from local gossip, and there is no doubt that such cases of concealed illegitimacy are common even to-day. Public records may be all we have, but that does not make them more reliable than local knowledge. If one rejects this approach but accepts, as I believe one must, that Tryphena bore Hardy's child, then one is compelled to ask why Hardy failed to marry her.

1. Information from John Antell of Puddletown, confirmed by the Dorset Registrar's Office, Dorchester.

2. R.F. Dalton, former curator of the Dorset County Museum, to Lois Deacon, 1960 (date and month missing); and Harold Hoffman to Mrs Bromell, February 19, 1940.

It is true that cousin-marriages were subject to strong disapproval, and during the passage of the Census Act in 1871 the matter was even raised in the House of Commons;¹ it also appears that Hardy was not the only member of his family to cause bitterness, for his sister Mary was apparently engaged to a cousin for several years, until ultimately the family prevented the marriage² -- a fact which throws additional light on The Return of the Native. Yet it seems improbable that opposition to marriage between cousins could have been so strong as to prevent Hardy's marriage with Tryphena once she was pregnant by him. It seems equally unlikely that the objection could have been made on the grounds of Tryphena's illegitimacy, supposing for the moment that she really was illegitimate -- as we have seen, Hardy himself had been the cause of a hasty wedding. Nor, for that matter, is one justified in assuming that Hardy simply met Emma Lavinia Gifford in 1870 and abandoned Tryphena for her sake: there is no firm evidence that Hardy loved Emma Lavinia in 1870.³

If, in search of an explanation, one adopts the method outlined by Hardy himself in the preface to A Group of Noble Dames, comparing dates of births, marriages, and deaths, and drawing one's conclusions from them and not from the records, one comes face to face with the formidable character of Rebecca Sparks. When Rebecca died suddenly in Tryphena's married home at Topsham on September 23, 1885, her death was registered and her age given as 54.⁴ It may be that her age was not checked,

1. See G.H. Darwin, "Marriages Between First Cousins", Fortnightly Review, 18, July-December, 1875.

2. Information from John Antell of Puddletown, related to both the Hardy and the Sparks families.

3. See below for a further discussion on this point.

4. A copy of the birth certificate, Item VII of the accompanying file, should be compared with Item VI.

but on the whole all branches of the family seem to have been extremely careful, and not too scrupulous, about keeping family records; if Tryphena or the Gales checked Rebecca's family Bible they would have discovered that Rebecca was three days short of 56. She cannot have been born into the family in 1831 (which would be necessary if she really were 54) since Emma Sparks, her sister, was born on May 26 of that year. But if the entry in Rebecca's Bible is correct ("Rebecca Maria was born at P'town: 26th Sept. 1829") she was born nine months, almost to the day, after her parents' marriage on Christmas Day, 1828. This is certainly possible, but there are so many attempts to adjust the family records that I frankly do not believe it to be true. I do not believe the records, and it is an interesting coincidence that Rebecca's own record, that inscribed in her Bible, should have been set up only in 1868, the year of her mother's death, apparently the year of Randal's birth, and when Rebecca herself was over thirty-five. It is also reasonable to wonder why Rebecca, if the sister of Tryphena, should have been prepared to abandon her husband for the sake of keeping Tryphena's respectability as a headmistress. If that were the only factor involved both the Paines could have looked after the child.

These details were Lois Deacon's starting-point for the train of thought which led her to believe that Tryphena was Rebecca's daughter. The circumstantial details given in Chapter 13 of Providence and Mr. Hardy strengthen her case, particularly the relationships which existed between the Hardys and the Martins from the year before Tryphena's birth in 1851; and while

Miss Deacon's case is very far from overwhelming I would describe it, at the very least, as plausible.

The degree of conjecture involved in this discussion is enormous, but I can see no alternative to it. We are faced on the one hand with Miss Deacon's theory, apparently unacceptable to Hardy's admirers, and certainly not proven; but, on the other hand, we meet a set of dubious records compiled in part by the family of an author who showed marked aptitude in cloaking his own life story, and with a set of incidents which are frankly incomprehensible if one accepts the records as true. The greatest strength of Miss Deacon's views is that they do provide an explanation for events. If her theories are accepted we must assume that incest took place; yet if we refuse to believe that we have to reckon with a Hardy who wantonly abandoned the cousin who had borne his child, and who apparently refused to acknowledge the child's existence for the rest of his life. Personally I can accept unwitting "incest" as a probable feature of Hardy's career; I cannot accept that he wrote as he did and lived as he did if his life were based upon a lie.

It would be so easy to ignore all this, and to accept ~~that~~ the standard biographies of Hardy's life which were authoritative until Lois Deacon's work was published: to write of the dignified elder man of letters and to assume that his character in old age reflected the character of his youth. Easy, but dishonest. And, moreover, of very little help in explaining the nature of Hardy's work. It is inconceivable that Jude the Obscure grew out of a cool, platonic love-idyll between two cousins; inconceivable that because Hardy,

for whatever reason, failed to marry Tryphena he should have felt so deeply that there was a "family curse" to which he himself was subject; and almost inconceivable that Little Father Time and his exploits were simply the diseased products of the imagination of a childless man. The suggestions put forward above are not proved, and may very possibly be wrong; but they are nearer to the truth than the early chapters of the Life, and they do more honour to Hardy in that they attempt, at least, to discover and accept the truth.

They are certainly important. Hardy's work shows a fairly consistent development in his approach to his themes: it is possible to see among the earlier works an intellectual concern with the problems of human choice and responsibility, in which autobiographical elements are of minor importance only; but the autobiographical elements eventually cloud the intellectual issues. As Hardy's work proceeds we find him circling around his personal obsessions, obviously aware of their force, and perhaps afraid to bring them into the open. It is only with Tryphena's death in 1890 that personal inhibitions are thrown completely aside, and Hardy's well-nigh neurotic obsession with his own and his family's past comes close to ruining the book. One can see the beginning and the end of the process quite clearly by comparing Jude the Obscure and Under the Greenwood Tree. To read both books at one sitting is to realise that Fancy Day and Sue Bridehead are the same person, and the Life¹ shows us that the earlier book was written before the break with Tryphena. On the return -- but not the rejection -- of the MS by Macmillan's in 1871 Hardy "threw the MS into a box with his old poems, being quite sick of all such"; and when

1. Life, pp. 86-90.

he was approached by Tinsley a year later "he could not at first recollect ~~the~~ what he had done with the MS". Since Macmillan's had not rejected the book -- had, indeed, given a broad hint that they would publish it at a later date -- it seems probable that it was the incipient collapse of his affair with Tryphena which made him abandon a work which appears to contain some of the details of their courtship. At this time Hardy had not merely abandoned this work, but had given up all ideas of writing; there seems more in this than an over-sensitive response to criticism, although admittedly Hardy's response to criticism was always painful. Taking everything into consideration, it may not be too much to say that Under the Greenwood Tree and Jude the Obscure represent two imaginative reconstructions of his love for Tryphena, the one gay and unrestrained, the other passionately embittered by loss and the consequences of a bad marriage.

It will readily be observed that the time-sequence for this conjectural interpretation of events does not fit the time-sequence indicated in the Life, so far as the Life indicates a time-sequence at all for these years; and most especially it takes no account of Hardy's "Cornish romance" with Emma Lavinia Gifford in 1870. The reason for this is that all the material available for Hardy's visit to Cornwall is post hoc evidence. Very oddly, the account in the Life is presented through the eyes of Emma Lavinia, Hardy, by his own admission, having made "laconic and hurried" notes merely.¹ When he does make a direct comment on this period it is not to be ~~trusted~~ ^{trusted}; he writes of his wooing, for example, as "without a hitch from beginning to end, and with encouragement

1. Life, p. 74.

from all parties concerned", which is totally at variance with Florence Hardy's view:

On Thursday he started for Plymouth to find the grave of Mrs H.'s father (-- that amiable gentleman who wrote to him as "a low-born churl who has presumed to marry into my family."). 1.

That Hardy found Emma attractive is beyond doubt; that he formed any early intention to marry her, or that he fell in love with her and abandoned Tryphena for her sake, is less likely. Again Florence Hardy, a biassed but probably trustworthy source, gives us a more consistent pattern of events:

. . . I cannot believe that those days in Cornwall -- at St. Juliot -- were really so free and happy. Her father at that time was a bankrupt -- and I hear since has been struck off the rolls -- another brother had shown signs of insanity -- and another was bringing the whole family into disgrace. One sister had married the old clergyman to escape the life of companion to an exacting old lady -- and she was trying to marry her youngest sister -- the late Mrs T.H. -- to any man who would have her. They had nearly secured a farmer when T.H. appeared. And she was nearly thirty then. And the sisters had violent quarrels. Of course the whole situation has been much idealized. I expect though the poor girl liked being in the Rectory as it must have been an improvement on her truly horrible home -- with the father's drunken ravings -- once in Plymouth he chased the mother into the street in her night-gown. 2.

Nor is it convincing to regard A Pair of Blue Eyes as a portrait of events in Cornwall, however imaginative: Rutland has shown³ that some sections of the book may have been written well before Hardy met Emma Lavinia, and Lois Deacon has taken this suggestion further, with considerable weight.⁴

1. Florence Hardy to Edward Clodd, March 7, 1913. Original in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

2. Florence Hardy to Rebekah Owen, October 24, 1915. Original in the Colby College Library, Waterville, Maine.

3. Rutland, pp. 124, 128.

4. op.cit., Ch. 9.

The legend of the "Cornish romance" is based primarily on the 1912-13 poems, which suggest that Hardy carefully remembered the incidents of his visits to Cornwall; and indeed, his preservation of memories of his childhood loves would suggest that this would have been in character. In particular one would expect him to recall the laying of the foundation-stone for the restored church of St. Juliot, since the ceremony was performed by Emma Lavinia herself. Yet he wrote to the rector of St. Juliot in 1913:

It was a pleasure for me to be able to inscribe upon [the memorial plaque to his wife] that my late wife laid the foundation stone for the rebuilding -- a fact ~~that~~ I had forgotten till reminded by a note in an old diary of hers. I can now recall that Mr. Holder gave the school children a tea on the occasion, & made a speech to them asking them to remember the event. Some may still be living in the parish who do remember it and remember her. 1.

One is almost tempted to question whether he was there at all -- he subsequently failed to appear for the church's reopening.² Hardy's letter is no more than a paraphrase of Emma's note:

Mr. Holder made . . . a speech to the young ones to remember the event, and speak of it to their descendants, just as if it had been a world-wide matter of interest. I wonder if they do remember it, and me. 3.

Hardy himself added to Emma's testimony, and made it clear that the interest which grew up between them could not have been of rapid growth:

The second visit being by invitation of Mr. Holder, the third and fourth professional, and the later ones entirely personal. 4.

1. Thomas Hardy to Rev. J.H. Dickinson, June 1, 1913. Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

2. Some Recollections, p. 59.

3. Ibid, p. 56.

4. Ibid, p. 56.

Some Recollections also shows that even Hardy's precise memories of 1870, as expressed in his poems, were mainly the result of his reading of Emma's notes, and this changes the value of the 1912-13 poems as evidence very considerably.

Nonetheless, Hardy did marry Emma Lavinia Gifford, and he did not marry Tryphena. She had met Charles Frederick Gale in Plymouth, and was eventually persuaded by him to return Hardy's ring. It may possibly have been this which prompted Hardy to forget his plans for Under the Greenwood Tree; and certainly the fair-haired, blue-eyed heroine of A Pair of Blue Eyes, riding over the fields of North Cornwall, is based upon Emma, so that passages of that book which were already written must have undergone some revision in the light of his new circumstances. In ~~August~~^{September}, 1874, he was married; Tryphena waited longer, until December, 1877, but in that month she married Charles Frederick Gale, and her child appears to have been sent to Nathaniel Sparks in Bristol.¹ Whatever the detailed course of events, it seems clear that the blow which struck Hardy during his young manhood struck during these years, and that Tryphena was deeply involved. So, too, was Horace Moule.

There is no record of any meeting between Hardy and Moule between his departure for Cornwall in 1870 and a chance meeting in 1872 -- Hardy simply says they had not met "for a long time".² About a year later, on June 15, 1873, he dined with Moule in London, and five days later visited him at Cambridge, staying in rooms in Queens'

1. Mrs Bromell said this became his home, and Sparks had left Puddletown by 1861. See census records: PRO R.G. 9 (1355), p. 69, 24, Duck Street, Puddletown.

2. Life, p. 87.

College:

Next morning went with H.M.M. to King's Chapel early. M. opened the great West doors to show the interior vista: we got upon the roof, where we could see Ely Cathedral gleaming in the distant sunlight. A never-to-be-forgotten morning. H.M.M. saw me off for London. His last smile. 1.

Three months later, on September 4, 1873, Hardy heard that Moule had committed suicide in his rooms at Cambridge. The death was particularly appalling: Moule had cut his throat, having left his brother calmly enough half an hour before, and his brother had been aroused by the sound of trickling blood. Moule was still conscious when found, and had whispered "Easy to die". The inquest revealed no certain cause. He had been subject to depression, and had apparently sought refuge in periodic drinking bouts, but this had only served to increase his depression. The Standard, in its ~~report~~ report of the inquest,² explains one possible origin of Moule's unhappiness:

It may be stated that the depression of the deceased is believed to have had its commencement with his university career. He was reputed one of the best classics of his time in the university, and was expected to head the university tripos, but he failed in his mathematical examination, and according to the usage of the university at that period was prevented from competing in classics, and this played upon his mind ever afterwards.

Moule's academic career, as Lois Deacon shows,³ was certainly long, and apparently extremely arduous. Having been three years a scholar at Trinity College, Oxford,

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1. Life, p. 93.

2. Quoted in Providence and Mr. Hardy, p. 95.

3. Ibid, pp. 95-6.

he left for Queens', Cambridge, without taking a degree, and did not in fact take his B.A. until thirteen years after his Cambridge matriculation. Whether this was because of some material obstacle in his path, or whether it owed its cause to some deficiency in the character of Moule himself, is not clear. What is clear is that Moule's death made a deep impression upon Hardy, and Hardy appears to have told us why:

Standing By The Mantelpiece
(H.M.M., 1873)

This candle-wax is shaping to a shroud
To-night. (They call it that, as you may know)--
By touching it the claimant is avowed,
And hence I press it with my finger -- so

To-night. To me twice night, that should have been
The radiance of the midmost tick of noon,
And close around ~~the~~^{me} wintertime is seen
That might have ~~shone~~^{shone} the veriest day of June!

But since all's lost, and nothing really lies
Above but shade, and shadier shades below,
Let me make clear, before one of us dies,
My mind to yours, just now embittered so.

Since you agreed, unurged and full-advised,
~~And~~ let warmth grow without discouragement,
Why do you bear you now as if surprised,
When what has come was clearly consequent?

Since you have spoken, and finality
Closes around, and my last movements loom,
I say no more; the rest must wait till we
Are face to face again, yonside the tomb.

And let the candle-wax thus mould a shape
Whose meaning now, if hid before, you know,
And how by touch one present claims its drape,
And that it's I who press my finger -- so. 1.

In claiming the "candle-shroud" Moule was claiming his own

imminent death. He had been talking of suicide long previously, and his doctor had feared it for at least thirteen months, i.e. since about August 1873, roughly the time when he had met Hardy again after a long separation. Hardy himself records several times in the pages of the Life that he was "not in bright spirits", "in no very grand spirits", etc, during 1870, 1871, and 1872, and there seems some reason to believe that both men were oppressed by the same difficulties. Whether Moule discussed suicide with Hardy, as this poem appears to suggest, or whether it is an imaginative reconstruction after the event, it clearly states that Moule's death was the result of personal difficulties, and one may accept Lois Deacon's view that like Stephen Smith in A Pair of Blue Eyes, Hardy had "let warmth grow without discouragement", and was disappointed at the outcome. It has been suggested¹ that the poem is addressed to a woman, presumably a titled lady who broke her engagement to Moule,² yet this seems unlikely. The reason appears to have been elsewhere. Academic disappointments may have had their effect, but they had not prevented Moule from attending to his duties as a Poor Law inspector, nor had they interfered with his activities as a reviewer. Moule's brother agreed that there were personal difficulties, not revealed at the inquest, though he did not specify them.³ Hardy appears to specify them almost minutely.

Tryphena's album contained the photograph of a man, heavily bearded, and apparently in his fifties;⁴ Hardy's personal album contained a photograph of Horace

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1. R.L. Purdy, Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study, p. 257.
 2. The information is derived from Professor Purdy.
 3. Providence and Mr. Hardy, p. 94.
 4. See accompanying file, Item XII.

Moule in his twenties, probably taken in the late 1850's, and inscribed by Moule for Hardy's benefit.¹ Despite the apparent ageing, there is little doubt that Tryphena's photograph was a portrait of the mature Horace Moule. The portrait was taken by David Rees, of 198, Clapham Road, Tryphena's own photographer -- he took a photograph of her shortly after her arrival at Stockwell Training College in 1869. The fact that Tryphena possessed Moule's photograph, and kept it in her album until the day of her death, suggests that there may have been some kind of attachment between them, and if there were it would explain why Moule and Hardy failed to meet for a period of at least two years. The situation finds its parallel in A Pair of Blue Eyes, the photograph may very well be the photograph of a student and leader-writer whose heart was broken by Sue Bridehead in Jude the Obscure (III-iv): the other photographs mentioned there, notably that of the child Sue, are based on actual photographs which still survive. It would explain the depression common to both Hardy and Moule during these years; and would account for the prevalent theme of betrayal in the Wessex novels. The longer one looks at this possibility the stronger it becomes. Given this fabric of the novels, given that Jude the Obscure is admittedly influenced by Tryphena and that it contains a record of academic frustration, sexual frustration and betrayal, periodically alleviated by drinking, given that A Pair of Blue Eyes concerns a woman who loses a young man of humble birth (whose father, like Hardy's, was a stone-mason) in favour of an older man, a reviewer

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1. See accompanying file, Item XI, and compare with Item XII.

who had taught his young friend Latin and Greek, given that the young woman is abandoned by both men and marries elsewhere, given that the photographs referred to in Jude the Obscure accord with existing photographs of Moule and Tryphena, and given, finally, the poems "The Mound", "Standing By The Mantelpiece", and "She At His Funeral"¹-- given all these pointers, is there really much doubt about the circumstances underlying Moule's suicide?

Moule was dead, Tryphena courted by another man -- who appears to have been very much aware of something in her past² -- and Hardy himself on the threshold of marriage with Emma Lavinia Gifford. The terrible period between 1869 and 1874 remained with him for the rest of his life, and to his memories of it Hardy appears to have added a further self-imposed torture. The ancestral curse hanging over the family of Jude and Sue, wrecking marriages and cankering lives, appears more than once in Hardy's work, and it looks very much as if the morbid side of his imagination dwelt on this problem as it affected his own family. The horrifying poem "Family Portraits"³ is the most explicit. Three persons, all portrayed in paintings apparently hanging in Hardy's room, step from their frames:

They set about acting some drama, obscure,
 The women and he,
 With puppet-like movements of mute strange allure;
 Yea, set about acting some drama, obscure,
 Till I saw 'twas their own lifetimes' tragic amour,
 Whose course begot me;

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1. C.P. 804, 846, and 10 respectively.
 2. Charles Gale's inscription in Tryphena's autograph album is reproduced in the accompanying file, Item XIII.
 3. C.P. 878.

Yea, -- a mystery, ancestral, long hid from my reach
 In the perished years past,
 That had mounted to dark doings, each against each
 In those ancestors' days, and long hid from my reach;
 Which their restless enghostings, it seemed, were to teach
 Me in full, at this last.

But fear fell upon me like frost, of some hurt
 If they entered anew
 On the orbits they smartly had swept when expert
 In the law-lacking passions of life, -- of some hurt
 To their souls -- and thus mine -- which I fain would avert
 So, in sweat cold as dew,

"Why wake up all this?" I cried out. "Now, so late!
 Let old ghosts be laid!"
 And they stiffened, drew back to their frames and numb state,
 Gibbering: "Thus are your own ways to shape, know too late!"
 Then I grieved that I'd not had the courage to wait
 And see the play played.

I have grieved ever since: to have balked future pain,
 My blood's tendency foreknown,
 Had been triumph. Nights long stretched awake I have lain
 Perplexed in endeavours to balk future pain
 By uncovering the drift of their drama. In vain,
 Though therein lay my own.

Heredity and its influence are frequently present in both poems and novels. And, as we have seen¹, even a preliminary survey of Hardy's ancestry reveals some disturbing features. I find it difficult to believe that, whatever the details, Hardy's disastrous union with Tryphena was seen by him as anything but a re-enactment of his ancestors' "tragic amour".

With all these memories and fears within him Hardy attempted to settle down in his marriage with Emma Lavinia Gifford. He used to say that the quality which he admired

1. See above, pp9-18.

most in her was the life that she possessed. As the years went by more and more of that life disappeared. It is too easy to describe her as snobbish, but there is no doubt that she enjoyed social and society life, and that she expected, as the wife of an architect, to find more opportunities for it than were ever possible at St. Juliot. As Hardy became an established author she must have expected it even more. In some respects she found it. As Hardy's reputation grew he became more and more socially desirable and socially acceptable: the flaw was that much of his social success was based on a literary success which Emma could not share. Even before their marriage she had written:

My work, unlike your work of ~~writing~~, does not occupy my true mind much . . . Your novel seems sometimes like a child, all your own and none of me.

1.

Yet she encouraged him to write, and was for many years a constant and willing assistant in the task of preparing copy for the publishers. It may or may not be true that she snubbed Hardy in public -- such stories are based largely on gossip which is difficult to verify, and which neither Hardy nor his first wife ever had the opportunity to refute -- but even without a sense of superiority to her husband she would have found, as the years went by, sufficient reason for discomfort in her marriage. Hardy himself had written "I feel that a bad marriage is one of the direct things on earth, & one of the cruellest things",² but it is too often forgotten that if Hardy was ill at ease, his wife was also; and his wry observations on the married

1. Notebooks, p. 48.

2. Thomas Hardy to Sir George Douglas, November 20, 1895. National Library of Scotland.

state, which begin with some vein of humour, but which rapidly sour, must have seemed to her a public criticism as tactless and outrageous as anything that could be charged against her. She may well have shared her husband's grief at their continued childlessness -- "We hear that Jane, our late servant, is to have a baby. Yet never a sign of one is there for us"¹ -- and this may have contributed largely to their troubles. She disliked the move to Dorchester -- Florence Hardy, too, was depressed by Max Gate² -- and most of all she felt increasingly at odds with Hardy's agnosticism. Her own religious views were fanciful, even fantastic, in a childish fashion, and little likely ever to have appealed to Hardy at any time of his life; and each year saw them travelling further in opposite directions, she becoming more and more visionary, he more and more rationalistic. When his views were finally expressed in the unequivocal form of Tess and Jude their marriage was at an end in everything but name. Her own attempts to obtain the suppression of Jude the Obscure, though they have become notorious, are understandable; but they brought with them a further exclusion from her husband's affairs:

My husband's books have not the same Kind of interest for me, as for others. I Knew every word of the first Edition -- in MS sitting by his side -- etc, etc -- so long ago, & so much endured since in this town in which I have been unhappy, that they are bound to be different to me! I had expected always to live in London with occasional visits to the country (I love the country however) -- Perhaps you may understand -- and

1. Life, p. 116.

2. See, for example, Florence Hardy to Charlotte Mew, October 1924 (no day given): ". . . the trees that hem us round & make some of our rooms so dark & depressing. . .". Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

perhaps not, that only authorship seldom causes the trouble that undesirable proximity does! . . . I would rather go to the seaside -- a quiet and forgotten kind of one -- than to London just yet. I am ensconcing myself in his big chair foraging -- he keeps me out usually -- as never formerly -- ah well! I have my private opinion of man in general & him in particular -- grand brains -- much power -- but too often lacking in judgement of ordinary matters -- opposed to unselfishness -- as regards themselves -- utterly useless and dangerous as magistrates! & such offices & to be put up with until a new order of the universe arrives (it will) 1.

The last years of Emma's life were clouded by some form of mental unbalance which appears to date from the period immediately following Jude the Obscure, and there is no doubt that that book alone did more to devastate Hardy's marriage than any other of his works, and than any act of personal unkindness. They were perhaps naturally incompatible, but the coldness which broke out between Hardy and his wife after 1890 was closer to enmity than indifference. Emma withdrew to an attic at the top of Max Gate, eating and living apart,² writing of it "my budoir is my sweet refuge and solace -- not a sound scarcely penetrates hither."³ In the year of their silver wedding she could write of her husband "the thorn is in my side still"⁴ and a few years later "my eminent partner will have a softening of the brain if he goes on as he does & the rest of the world does."⁵ For his part, Hardy became increasingly restless, moving his

1. Emma Hardy to Lady Hoare, April 24, 1910. Stourhead Collection, Wiltshire County Archives, Trowbridge.

2. See Emma Hardy to Rebekah Owen, February 2, 1899, and April 14, 1910. Both at Colby College, Waterville, Maine.

3. Emma Hardy to Rebekah Owen, April 24, 1910. (Colby.)

4. Emma Hardy to Rebekah Owen, April 24, 1899. (Colby)

5. Emma Hardy to Rebekah Owen, May 20, 1908. (Colby.)

study from room to room,¹ forgetting her birthday every year,² and avoiding so much as the mention of her name in his letters -- "I should think about the 9th or 10th Sept would suit, if we come. But I would leave it to her, for the date makes little difference to me. I believe she is going to sit to my sister for her portrait in September or October, which would necessitate her being here for a week or fortnight".³ Not even the words "my wife" appear in this particular letter.

To apportion blame for this tragic marriage is neither feasible nor relevant, except in so far as it throws light on the spirit in which Hardy's works were written. It should be said, however, that although Hardy scholars in general appear to show little sympathy for Emma, the surviving letters show her in a more favourable light than Hardy. His treatment of his second wife lacked charity, and on those grounds we may believe that Emma's complaints were not without justification. Frequently she mentions her own shyness, and this may have made it harder for her to express her unhappiness in terms which would evoke sympathy; but unhappy she certainly was. Hardy was primarily a dreamer, and the realm in which he dwelt was the dream-world of his own stormy past. He saw this past in terms of absolute good or bad, idealising happiness, as he later idealised Emma herself, and overstressing his unhappiness. Moreover, he approached happiness and unhappiness in different ways: happiness was a series

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1. Emma Hardy to Rebekah Owen, February 19, 1897. Colby College Library, Waterville, Maine.

2. Florence Hardy to Sydney Cockerell, November 26, 1922. Quoted in Friends of a Lifetime.

3. Thomas Hardy to Edward Clodd, August 5, 1910. Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

of precise and identifiable events, unhappiness a frame of mind, a screen of melancholy through which life, including its lighter moments, was seen. His views were strongly conditioned by his beliefs, and his beliefs strongly conditioned by his prevailing mood. No ~~subh~~ man can be easy to live with. He could show impatience of the optimism of others, and incredulity in the face of strong Christian beliefs expressed in even moderately fundamentalist terms. In fact he was more intolerant of the faith of others than his works would lead us to guess. He could, on the other hand, accord his fullest respect to the ways of life which faith inspired, and contempt for ways of life which he believed to be hypocritical. His admiration for the Perkins brothers, or for the priest William Barnes, was never hindered by disagreement with their religious opinions, and for the Christian ethic in its purest simplicity he retained a love that was all the greater because he could not share the beliefs involved. When Christianity appeared to him to verge on the superstitious -- and Emma's no doubt struck him as doing just that -- he could become angry. Of his humility there is no doubt; but it was a complex humility, subject to great strain, and at times a sadness for what he had lost, both spiritually and materially, could express itself in bitter criticism. Once, during his second marriage, Florence Hardy was late home, apparently at a Christian Science meeting with friends from Athelhampton Hall. On discovering that she had not returned Hardy's bitter comment was, "I suppose she is still down there dabbling in that rubbish!"¹ At other times his attitude towards the supernatural was

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1. Beaminster, 4.

a reluctant scepticism, but Florence Hardy was unfortunate enough to belong to the realm of the living. Emma Hardy had already taken her revenge: after her death in 1912 Hardy discovered her diaries and a manuscript entitled "What I Think of my husband". As Newman Flower wrote later, "the core of their tragedy lay in these written sheets".¹ Hardy burnt the papers, but was overwhelmed with remorse, a remorse which found expression in the poems of 1912-13, and in apparently endless visits to search for the Gifford family graves. His remorse was so strong that he forgot his obligations to his second wife, and she can hardly have enjoyed such expeditions at the opening of her marriage to him.² She was almost forty years younger than him, and their marriage had been a marriage of convenience contracted chiefly for his benefit,³ yet she was never allowed to invite friends to stay at Max Gate,⁴ Hardy himself grew increasingly reluctant to leave the house, and resented it if she did so,⁵ he offered her no marriage settlement,⁶ and kept her short of money, even for substantial medical expenses.⁷ His charity was for the dead, not for the living, and he could write of Emma after her death:

In later years an unfortunate mental aberration altered her much, & made her cold in correspondence with friends and relatives, but this was contrary to her real nature, & I myself quite disregard it in thinking of her. 8.

1. Just As It Happened, p. 96.

2. He was still curious in 1916: "The only way in which I shall be able to tempt him to leave will be by consenting to go to Plymouth to look for more Gifford graves". Florence Hardy to Rebekah Owen, November 19, 1916. Colby College Library, Waterville, Maine.

3. Florence Hardy to Rebekah Owen, February 9, 1914. (Colby).

4. Florence Hardy to Rebekah Owen, July 17, 1915 and December 3, 1915. (Colby).

5. Florence Hardy to Violet Hunt, December 23, 1925. Berg Collection.

6. Florence Hardy to Rebekah Owen, December 13, 1915. (Colby).

7. Florence Hardy to Rebekah Owen, December 30, 1915. (Colby).

8. Essays and Studies, 1966, p. 117.

-- though in fact Emma's surviving letters to her friends¹ are anything but cold. But as he mourned over Tryphena, so he mourned over Emma; to such an extent that Florence Hardy was provoked into exclaiming "All the poems about her are a fiction, but a fiction in which their author has now come to believe".² Hardy's habitual melancholy became infectious?

It seems to me that I am an utter failure if my husband can publish such a sad, sad book. He tells me that he was written no despondent poem for the last eighteen months, & yet I cannot help feeling that the man who wrote some of those poems is utterly weary of life & cares for nothing in this world. 3.

She was not so far wrong. In 1887 he wrote to Edmund Gosse:

As to despondency I have known the very depths of it. You would be quite shocked if I were to tell you how many weeks and months in bygone years I have gone to bed wishing never to see daylight again. 4.

And once he told T.P. O'Connor that "he did not care if every book he had ever written were burned and never seen or heard of again."⁵

It would be easy to condemn the "drab little man" of Hardy's old age, and it is not difficult to see that the characteristics which marked him then were already strongly present in early manhood. Yet the picture I

1. Most are at Colby or in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

2. Quoted in Cockerell, p. 223.

3. Florence Hardy to Lady Hoare, December 6, 1914. Stourhead Papers, Wiltshire County Archives.

4. Quoted by Irene Cooper Willis, "Thomas Hardy", an unpublished typescript in the Colby College Library; dated 1914; p. 11.

5. Daily Telegraph, January 13, 1928.

have suggested here is that of a man who deserves pity more than condemnation. His experience with Tryphena, his marriage to Emma, and his sensitive, self-protective response to ~~ix~~ it, meant that rightly or wrongly Hardy felt his life to be a failure: against a background of rich tradition and rural fatality, he could see his own career as emotionally soured, and insignificant; in terms of theological belief he was conscious of what had gone, even though he never ceased to search for some replacement for his lost faith. And in terms of literary endeavour he felt that his chief merits as a poet were ignored, and his purpose as a novelist misunderstood. The picture is a depressing one.

Yet the sympathetic response to suffering and pain present in the novels, the Life, and in some letters, the genuine acceptance of responsibility for the failure of his first marriage, and the deep admiration accorded to him by younger people, literary and unliterary, all suggest that the picture is inadequate; and all of them are real. During his eighties Hardy visited Sturminster Newton, the earliest of his homes with Emma, and recaptured the experience:

" . . . I planted that tree when I came here. It was then a small tree not so high as my shoulder . . . I suppose that was a long time ago. I brought my first wife here after our honeymoon. . . . She had long golden hair . . . How that tree has grown! But that was in 1876. . . . How it has changed! . . . Time changes everything except something within us which is always surprised by change". 1.

His writings, his response to the past, and his compassion

1. Newman Flower, Just As It Happened, p. 97.

were real and unchanging, however much they might be obscured in day-to-day personal relations. The passionate side of his nature and the puritan appear to have been widely separated in him, and his self-distrust led to an overwhelming shyness which too often stood in the way of generous and easy intercourse with his fellow-men. It accounts for some of the deceptions in the Life, whereas the cloak of fiction in his novels allowed him to throw off his reticence. Moreover, the evidence of those who did enjoy his friendship shows that beneath his reticence there was a warm and humane spirit. There is Mrs Gertrude Bugler, for example, Hardy's choice for the part of Tess in the London and Dorset productions of the dramatised novel, and a woman whom Hardy loved in his old age:¹

A great deal has been written during his lifetime, and since his death, of the sad philosophy and pessimistic attitude to life of Thomas Hardy, but to us he was not the grim, cynical man often pictured, and if he sometimes emphasised the darker side of life, he never forgot the sunshine and the laughter. I can still hear him laugh . . . 2.

There is T.E.Lawrence:

T.H. was above and beyond all men living as a person. I used to go to Max Gate afraid, & half-unwillingly, for fear that it would perhaps no longer seem true to me: but always it was. 3.

Or there is Edmund Blunden:

Really he should have been not so gentle and observant a host, but a parent; he spoke of the visit of the Prince of Wales much as a father might have done in viewing the enormous over-strain of a well-beloved son . . . My later days . . . produced a figure of him as a sort of dynast in disguise, when he had assembled around him quite a number of

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1. See Cockerell, pp. 214-6.
 2. Beamister, 1.
 3. David Garnett, Letters of T.E.Lawrence, London, 1964, p. 592.

people, and those mostly awaiting his prophetic direction. He never 'took the floor', but was able to be with us all and beyond us all -- not deserting us, but now and then observe where he stood. 1.

Finally, there is the testimony of his second wife, who bore the brunt of his self-enclosure, sensitivity, and the irritableness of old age:

I am full of joy to see how my husband finds himself in his true environment here. He went off just now in his cap & gown -- very, very pleased with his adornments -- to dine in his college (Magdalene) & he loves being Dr. Hardy. He is really just like a boy -- or a nice child. He hates wearing his Order of Merit -- but he is tremendously proud of his cap & gown -- I often wonder how many people realise the simplicity of his nature. He told me the other day that he thought he had never grown up.

. . . Of course I do know he has a tender and protective affection for me -- as a father for a child -- as he has always had -- a feeling quite apart from passion. And I feel towards him, sometimes, as a mother towards a child with whom things have somehow gone wrong -- a child who needs comforting -- to be treated gently with all the love possible. 2.

Against such a background Hardy emerges as a contradictory figure, passionate and reticent, charitable but with a strong degree of self-centredness, humble but with strongly-held and powerfully-expressed personal opinions. He has been presented to us as a gentle, frail, essentially simple man: but simplicity is of a strange nature, and Hardy's simplicity had been buffeted by too much to remain intact. I can only see him as a figure of great and complex power, whose complexity penetrates his works, and for whom the works were an escape from his own nature.

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1. Beaminster, 10.

2. Florence Hardy to Lady Hoare, April 7, 1914. Stourhead Papers, Wiltshire County Archives.

III

. . . who or what shall fill his place?
 Whither will wanderers turn distracted eyes
 For some fixed star to stimulate their pace
 Towards the goal of their enterprise?

C.P. 307.

We have seen that Hardy's early Christian faith was slowly undermined, and how it appears to have collapsed finally under a crushing personal blow whose consequences included anger, bewilderment, and a sense of guilt. It is obvious from the poems that he deeply regretted the loss of faith, and for the rest of his life he attempted to find some other consolation. We know from the Life that he read widely in philosophy, and this reading was an attempt to find some belief based on purely rational ~~premisses~~ ~~premisses~~ which would match the facts of existence as he saw them: but the facts which he saw were very much the product of a personal mood, and Hardy's eventual beliefs owe more to his frame of mind than his frame of mind owed to his beliefs.

Even as a child he was affected by a prevailing sense of melancholy. Lying on the grass, wishing he might never grow up, was an experience he never forgot, and which he recalled in the Life, in Jude, and in at least two poems.¹ Possibly as a result of the rural changes he saw and the spiritual changes which he underwent, he grew to interpret life in terms of change and decay, and this interpretation expressed

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1. Life, pp. 15-16, Jude, I-ii, C.P. 825 & C.P. 846.

itself powerfully in his writing; it may even be that the value which he set upon the past had its source in the unchangeability of the past in memory. Perhaps the most powerful influence of all, however, was that of Darwin: it is not certain that Hardy accepted all the implications of Darwin's theory, but the notion of life as a perpetual struggle for survival, with the downtreading of the weak or incapable, affected his outlook to such an extent that the death of Christianity in him may be traced to this one cause: such a morality inherent in the frame of things was totally opposed to an apparently man-made ethic based on compassion and understanding. And from this observation grew the notion that the human environment was unworthy of the creature that had evolved within it. It seemed illogical that a blind, instinctive process should be the rule, and that men should be subject to it, when men themselves possessed reason and foresight. And it seemed not merely illogical, but unjust, that men should possess a sensibility which caused them to suffer from a dispensation which they apparently could not change.

Earlier ages had discerned a natural order in the universe which, if it did not always explain suffering and evil, at least gave reassurance by asserting that there was an explanation. The Great Chain of Being of the mediaeval world, which found expression in Shakespeare's notion of order and harmony inherent in the universe, or in Pope's view that

whatever wrong we call
May, must be right, as relative to all
had, despite Pope's assurance, weakened over the

centuries, and it became impossible for many in the age of Darwin. Some clung all the more to their old faith as a refuge (and Victorian faith is not a thing to be despised); others were able to learn to suspend judgement, welcoming a spirit of inquiry without regret. Hardy could do neither of these things: there is no doubt that he felt that rational inquiry was to be welcomed, but he was disturbed by the lack of order which appeared to be Nature's rule, and he may have felt with J.A. Symonds:

Give a man . . . one creed, throw him a mustard seed of faith, and he will move mountains. It does not much matter what a man believes; but for power and happiness he must believe something, 1.

For Hardy the position was complicated because his needs were not primarily rational: the power of instinct and the appeal of the supernatural, though dismissed by his mind, were seized by his spirit with a deep yearning; what he wished to do was to satisfy his spiritual and emotional needs on a rational basis:

I am most anxious to believe in what, roughly speaking, we may call the supernatural -- but I find no evidence for it! People accuse me of scepticism, materialism, and so forth; but if the accusation is just at all, it is quite against my will. For instance, I seriously assure you that I would give ten years of my life -- well, perhaps that offer is rather beyond my means -- but when I was younger I would cheerfully have given ten years of my life to see a ghost -- an authentic, indubitable spectre. . . my will to believe is perfect. If ever a

1. Quoted in W.E.Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, Yale and London, 1957, p. 98.

ghost wanted to manifest himself, I am the very man he should apply to. But no -- the spirits don't seem to see it! 1.

Hardy's deepest wish was to impose order upon experience and nature; any order, but preferably some system that would match the facts of experience by justifying human reason and sensibility, and by giving some purpose to human existence. I believe that in the end he failed, because the order which he discerned could not satisfy his emotional needs. But that he saw an order is, I believe, undeniable.

That there was a conscious effort to replace his faith he made clear himself:

After reading various philosophic systems, and being struck with their various contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience. He will not escape using terms and phraseology from earlier philosophers, but let him avoid adopting their theories if he values his own mental life. Let him remember the fate of Coleridge, and save years of labour by working out his own views as given him by his surroundings. 2.

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1. William Archer, "Real Conversations", Pall Mall Magazine, XXIII, 1901, pp. 527-537. Interestingly enough, Hardy did see a ghost in his later years: "He saw a ghost in Stinsford Churchyard on Christmas Eve, and his sister Kate says it must have been their grandfather upon whose grave T.H. had just placed a sprig of holly, -- the first time he had ever done so. The ghost said 'A green Christmas' -- and T.H. replied 'I like a green Christmas'. Then the ghost went into the church, and being full of curiosity T. followed to see who this strange man in 18th century dress might be -- and found no-one. That is quite true -- a real Christmas ghost-story". Florence Hardy to Sydney Cockerell, quoted in Friends of a Lifetime, pp. 305.
2. Life, p. 310.

That Hardy did this, and that his own experience modified the opinions which he derived from others, is made clear by comparing a collection of literary notes taken from a wide range of contemporaries with the ideas expressed in The Dynasts and the poems: we select The Dynasts at this point because this work was written at a time when his opinions were, or seem to have been, at their most stable, and because in writing his epic Hardy was compelled to examine his views carefully in order to find an adequate expression for them. After the outbreak of the First World War the views that he had formed, though they eventually survived, were so shaken that they remained more tentative and wishful than formerly. Two notebooks, both in the Dorset County Museum, can be dated roughly by their extracts from periodicals, the first book beginning in 1867 and taking us up to 1887 or the beginning of 1888. The second dates from 1888 to at least 1921, and may possibly contain all the extracts of this type up to the time of Hardy's death in 1928. They thus cover a very large part of his life, and probably the whole of his literary career. It is therefore surprising that the range of subjects they cover is limited, and it appears that Hardy has noted only those ideas which correspond or seemed likely to contribute to his own. The ideas he evolved during his reading were tentative, and he was frequently at pains, particularly with reference to The Dynasts, to deny that he had established any system. In this he was overstating the facts, but nonetheless his mind remained open -- just because, one may guess, his

needs were not fully met -- and it should be remarked that what may be stated here~~x~~ as a firm belief was in reality held by Hardy himself to be a working hypothesis only.

Hardy's two "literary" notebooks show that although his reading among the major philosophers was wide,¹ he was more persuaded by the thinkers of his own time, and often by those writers who are now regarded as representatives only of Victorian thought, and not as contributors to the main stream of philosophy. They illustrate very clearly to what an extent he belonged to his age and shared the most obvious ideas and speculations of the Victorians. Any limitations that this may imply do not matter here: nor does it matter that some of the ideas he took may be dismissed fairly easily. The only test which has been applied in our use of these writings is the test of their relevance to Hardy's works and, at this stage, their particular relevance to The Dynasts.

The passages, as might be expected, are primarily concerned with the nature of human conduct and with the role of human conduct in an evolutionary setting. Occasionally a phrase attracts our attention as the source of a line or a paragraph from Hardy's writings, and these may often show how Hardy's mind was working. One such passage, which discusses the nature of order in the universe, is taken from J.A. Symonds's The Greek Poets,² which Hardy read closely:

Greek morality . . . leaned on a faith or
belief in the order of the universe . . .

1. Hardy's reading is treated extensively in Rutland, Thomas Hardy, A Study of His Writings and Their Background, Oxford, 1938, New York, 1962; and Bailey, Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind, Chapel Hill, 1956.

2. J.A. Symonds, Studies in the Greek Poets, 2 series, London, 1873-6.

Man is answerable only to its order for his conduct.

. . . If disease and affliction fall upon us we must remember that we are the limbs and organs of the whole, and that our suffering is necessary for its well-being. We are thus citizens of

~~xxxxx~~ a vast estate, members of the universal economy.

. . . Humanity is part of the universal whole . . .

Nature [Man's] with all its imperfections

in the physical and moral orders . . . must be accepted as the best possible, and that which was

intended to be so. 1.

That Hardy saw men as belonging to a single organism will be readily apparent to any reader of the stage-directions of The Dynasts. But this passage is more important because it highlights Hardy's chief difficulty, that of recognising any morality in the universal estate, and his chief dilemma was how to reconcile pain and suffering with the notion of a moral universe. When a fragment of this passage re-emerged in the epic it stated the problem succinctly:

SPIRIT OF THE YEARS

The cognizance ye mourn, Life's doom to feel,
If I report it meetly, came unmeant,
Emerging with blind gropes from impercipience
By listless sequence -- luckless, tragic Chance,
In your more human tongue.

SPIRIT OF THE PITIES

And hence unneeded
In the economy of Vitality,
Which might have ever kept a sealed cognition
As doth the Will Itself.

(I,v,4).

Hardy is not here solving a problem, but only stating it: the unhappy contrast between the consciousness of men and the unconsciousness of the forces inherent in the universe.

1. Literary notebooks, I. The addition in square brackets is Hardy's.

He appears to have recognised that of itself that setting could not alter, but he also felt that an apparent deficiency in man -- his consciousness and his power of foresight -- might be turned into an advantage if through it some amelioration of men's physical and spiritual condition might be obtained. And he grasped readily at the idea -- present in Symonds, but probably not taken from him -- that the universal whole was an organism in which we are "limbs and organs of the whole", on the grounds that organisms are not static, but must evolve. A number of passages which he selected repeat this view of the universe as an organic body, and stress the similarities between different levels of the natural, post-Darwinian world. A passage from Jude, noted in our earlier pages, refers to "the little cell called your life", and the organic term is certainly not accidental, each life being regarded as a part of some larger unit, be it the family, society, the realm of animal life, and so on. Hardy could accept this, but he could not help speculating on the universality of corruption throughout the organism of life, and indeed, throughout life's environment. When this idea was expressed for him he lost no time in recording it:

Galton on the defects, evil, and apparent waste on our globe -- "We perceive around us a countless number of abortive seeds and germs; we find out of any group of a thousand men selected at random, some who are crippled, insane, idiotic, and otherwise incurably imperfect in body or mind, and it is possible that this world may rank among other worlds as one of these."

That this idea made a deep impression on Hardy is evident from his rephrasing of it in Tess of the D'Urbervilles:

'Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?'

'Yes'.

'All like ours?'

'I don't know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubborn-tree. Most of them splendid and sound -- a few blighted.'

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

'A blighted one'.

1.

Fortunately Hardy's development did not stop at this point -- though there is no evidence that he did not continue to accept this judgement. But writing of Leslie Stephen² Hardy said that his "philosophy was to influence his own for many years, indeed more than that of any other contemporary", and from Stephen he quoted, and particularly marked, one passage:

[By Darwinism] we are no longer forced to choose between a fixed order imposed by supernatural sanction and accidental combination capable of instantaneous and arbitrary reconstruction, [but] recognise in society, as in individuals, the development of an organic structure, by slow secular processes.

3.

There could be no difficulty in believing, with Symonds, that man's imperfections must be accepted: but Darwinism, which had contributed so much to the wreck of one faith, might yet point towards a new hope: if the universal order were not supernaturally imposed, and if it were not dependent for its construction on "instantaneous and

1. Tess, iv.

2. Life, p. 100.

3. Literary Notebook, I. The italics are Hardy's. Source: "An Attempted Philosophy of History", Fortnightly Review, 27, January-June 1880, p. 679.

arbitrary factors", then possibly it might not merely develop but might be developed. Such development could only be the result of combined human effort, since only human beings possessed the knowledge combined with foresight and perceptiveness which would be required. It seems to have been through a process of thought similar to this that Hardy reached the notion of "equilibrium", a state in which mortals might influence the development of their environment, which he was to use in The Dynasts, and which makes its appearance in the novels. He noted an instance of equilibrium as it affected the universal order:

The universe, it may be said, consists of a multiplicity of independent beings who gradually come to settle down into a stable equilibrium -- atoms or molecules making as it were a permanent social contract with one another. The world would then be the "best of all possible worlds" in the sense that it is the arrangement best fitted to survive. Such a view undoubtedly agrees with much that is commonly said about evolution. 1.

And he noted, further, a passage from F.W.H. Myers which sees stability within one man's consciousness, and in the consciousness of many, as a result of the same kind of social contract; a passage which may suggest how he came to regard the effects of the criminal or disruptive individual on the social order:

The unity of an individual organism -- "a unity aggregated from multiplicity" -- the cells of my body are mine in the sense that for their own comfort and security they have agreed to do a great many things at the bidding of my brain. But they are servants with a life of their own;

1. Literary Notebook, II. Source. D.G. Ritchie, Philosophical Studies, London, 1905.

they can get themselves hypertrophied, so to speak, in the kitchen, without my being able to stop them. Does my consciousness testify that I am a single entity? That only means that a stable coenesthesia exists in me just now; a sufficient number of my nervous centres are acting in unison. I am being governed by a good working majority. Give me a blow on the head which silences some leading centres, and the rest will split up into "parliamentary groups" and brawl in delirium or madness. 1.

It is a straightforward step to transfer this notion of physical equilibrium into a view of society as ^asingle organism consisting of numerous potentially stable or discordant elements, and it is that step which Hardy took in The Dynasts, and which he appears to have been working towards for some years: the idea is present as early as Far From the Madding Crowd, for example, The Dynasts reveals the dissolution of one state of equilibrium and the gradual re-establishment of another; this was a logical culmination of Hardy's thought, and the passages cited above are chosen chiefly because they illustrate Hardy's interests -- only rarely are they themselves his source-material.

In a note made in 1880 he refers to "the organism, Society", ² and in 1890 he writes:

Altruism; or the Golden Rule, or whatever 'Love your Neighbour as Yourself' may be called, will ultimately be brought about, I think, by the pain we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if they were part of one body. Mankind, ^{we and} in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame. 3.

Together with this mention of altruism we should perhaps remind ourselves of Hardy's comment on the principal figure

1. Literary Notebook, I. Source: F.W.H. Myers, "Human Personality", Contemporary Review, February 1885.

2. Life, p. 146.

3. Life, p. 224.

of The Dynasts, Napoleon himself, as

the man who finished the ^Revolution with a "whiff of grapeshot", and so~~x~~crushed not only its final horrors but all the worthy aspirations of its earlier time, made them as if they had never been, and threw back human altruism scores, perhaps hundreds of years. 1.

In fact The Dynasts presents Napoleon as a betrayed of the human cause; Hardy does not deny his original good intentions, but sees him much as he sees Gabriel Oak's dog,² whose good intentions lead only to the destruction of the sheep he had been supposed to guard. Yet to write in these terms Hardy must have had some belief in the effectiveness of human action, and his comments on history, so far as they are present in the Life, suggest the same; so, too, does a letter written a year and a half before his death:

I fear that rational religion does not make much way at present. Indeed the movement of thought seems to have entered a back current in the opposite direction. These however are not uncommon in human history. 3.

And in general Hardy's approach seems to be that it is possible for human acts to sw^ay events, providing that certain features of his environment are first recognised: firstly, that unrelenting change is inherent in the universe and is part of the nature of all things; secondly, that human action must take into account that it can only alter the course of change. What certainly is not clear is the extent to which human endeavour may be effective, or to what extent human endeavour may be

1. Life, p. 436.

2. Far From the Madding Crowd, Ch. V. The dog is described standing on the edge of the quarry "dark and motionless as Napoleon at St. Helena".

3. Thomas Hardy to Edward Clodd, July 1, 1926. Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

consciously and voluntarily undertaken. The passages which Hardy cites on this point -- like many that could be cited from Hardy himself -- all suggest that the degree of voluntary action available to us is extremely limited. Firstly we will be bound by the actions of our predecessors:

Our actions;- Each act, as it has had immeasurable antecedents, will be fruitful of immeasurable consequents, for the web of the world is for ever weaving. 1.

This, which has an obvious relevance to "the great web of human doings" of The Woodlanders,² is immediately followed by the observation from Symonds that "always and everywhere men have been more and more ruled by the whole body of their predecessors". Again The Dynasts provides us with specific examples. After Napoleon has been crowned at Milan,³ the Spirit of the Pities immediately draws attention to the consequences of his action, consequences which will involve the whole continent; and later in the notebook Hardy quotes another passage which was reshaped in The Dynasts, and which takes up the same question:

In politics so much the largest part of what we do is only clever adaptation to meet opinions which are not really our own. . . . In all that seething multitude of men and women . . . was there a thought, or feeling, or habit, or a ceremony that, like the tracings on a chestnut leaf, had not been formed in its smallest detail by the infinite succession of touchings and retouchings too many and delicate to be imagined. 4.

This illustrates very clearly what Hardy had in mind when he penned the Spirit of the Years' final comment

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1. Symonds, The Greek Poets, quoted in Literary Notebook I.
 2. Ch. iii.
 3. The Dynasts, I,i,6.
 4. Literary Notebook, I. From Auberon Herbert, "A Politician in Trouble", cited by Hardy. See Fortnightly Review, 34, July-December, 1883, pp. 361 & 370.

on Napoleon. The phrase "tracings on a chestnut leaf" lodged itself in Hardy's brain and re-appeared, much changed, but identifiable:

Such men as thou, who wade across the world
To make an epoch, bless, confuse, appal,
Are in the elemental ages' chart
 Like meanest insects on obscurest leaves
 But incidents and grooves of Earth's unfolding...
 (III,vii,9)

The "tracings" on the leaf have now become "incidents and grooves of Earth's unfolding", a metamorphosis whose course can be seen clearly, but there is the same notion of minute and continuous adjustments affecting Napoleon's course. The remainder of Herbert's passage, which Hardy obviously read but does not cite, elaborates the idea, and draws conclusions which were not foreign to some of Hardy's moods:

Was there a thought or a feeling, a habit or a ceremony amongst them all that, like the tracings on a chestnut leaf, had not been formed in its smallest detail by the infinite succession of touchings and retouchings, too many and too delicate to be imagined, which had fallen upon it from that marvellous and eternal surrounding of matter ~~and~~ wedded to force, of which indeed all these things were creatures, and yet of which, when once called into existence, they themselves became a living and reacting part? And as he thought of the never-ceasing conflict, of the destroying and escaping, of the ever-revolving machinery, of the endless chain beginning where no eye could follow it, his brain turned sick, and thinking itself became a weariness to him, until at last he broke into the same complaint that so many others have done before him. "What can a man do, except merely creep through it all as best he may? It is all too terrible and too large. It is best not to think. Who dreams that he can alter

or shape the great forces as they carry him
along their unknown path?" 1.

Any reader of The Dynasts may quickly observe that men's actions there, though they certainly are governed by consequence, and by mute opinion -- which several of Hardy's notes in the Life treat very seriously indeed -- are also at the mercy of other forces. History, or the universe itself, possesses its own dynamic force, and man's consciousness is not only partly controlled by this, but has actually emerged through it -- it is this notion which allows Hardy to entertain the idea that consciousness may spread until it affects the Source itself. To some extent Hardy has adapted the theory of the Unconscious to his purposes to explain this dynamism. He quoted von Hartmann:

In all combinations of circumstances which by their nature occur but seldom, or where for other reasons a mechanism can only be constructed with difficulty, the direct activity of the Unconscious must display itself . . . e.g. the inclusion of the Unconscious in human brains which determine and guide the course of history . . . in the direction intended by the Unconscious. 2.

Hardy then adds a personal comment:

/the practical philosophy of the whole/ is the complete devotion of the personality to the world-process for the sake of its goal, the general world-redemption: otherwise expressed: To make the ends of the Unconscious ends of our own Consciousness.

The goal:- The world redemption from the misery of volition (i.e. life), a condition being that the yearning after annihilation attains resist-

1. op.cit., p. 370. Hardy's punctuation of his transcript of the earlier lines varies from that of the original.
2. Literary Notebook, II. See Philosophy of the Unconscious, Vol. III, Ch. XIV. The best discussion of Hardy's reading of von Hartmann is Bailey, Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind.

less authority as a practical motive.

This "yearning after annihilation" is an idea about which Hardy remained undecided. His reading of Schopenhauer¹ had brought him face to face with a definition of tragedy, which he noted, as a development of the intellect until it reaches a stage where "the vanity of all effort is manifest, and the will proceeds to an act of self-annulment",² but we have also seen that the notion of equilibrium in the social consciousness had had its appeal; and so far from believing that we should make "the ends of the Unconscious ends of our own Consciousness" Hardy asserted that the Unconscious had no ends, and that we should use our own consciousness to direct the course taken by events.

Earlier he had selected a passage from Myers's article on personality, quoted above, and added his own note to it:-

Lowest form of life -- "the single cell of protoplasm, endowed with reflex irritability".
-- "a more complex organism" -- mere juxtaposition [of cells] attaining to what is styled a 'colonial consciousness', where the group of organisms is for locomotive purposes a single complexly acting individual, though when united action is not required each polyp in the colony is master of his simple self.

The drift of the article [adds Hardy] is that beings have a multiplex nature, human as others; that what we suppose to be choice is reflex action only -- that by implanting impulses in hypnotic states they can be made part of the character. There seems reason in this, for

1. See Rutland, p. 93ff., and Garwood, Thomas Hardy, An Illustration of the Philosophy of Schopenhauer, Philadelphia, 1911.
2. Literary Notebook, II. Sources cited by Hardy as "Studies in Pessimism". Schopenhauer (May 13 '91). 69".

physical development, e.g. of the hand --
can be produced in other ways (by labour say) as
well as hereditarily. 1.

The state of equilibrium appears to correspond to a hypnotic state of this type, in which impulses may be implanted and the course of affairs altered thereafter as a consequence. Hardy returned to the idea more than once. In the poem "He Wonders About Himself",² for instance, he wrote in 1893:

Part is mine of the general Will,
Cannot my share in the sum of sources
Bend a digit the poise of forced,
And a fair desire fulfil?

And he makes the point equally explicit in the "Apology" to Late Lyrics and Earlier:

. . . whether the human and kindred animal races survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe, or whether these races perish and are succeeded by others before that conclusion comes, pain to all upon it, tongued ~~and~~^{or} dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces -- unconscious or other -- that have "the balancings of the clouds", happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often.

We have seen that Hardy's notion of equilibrium appears to have been gathered from a number of sources; and in view of his tribute to Leslie Stephen it is interesting to note that Hardy's view was formulated along premises which were quite different from Stephen's. Stephen, in The Science of Ethics,³ had maintained that pain and pleasure were the motives for action, and

1. Literary Notebook, I.
2. C.P. 479.
3. London, 1882, p.51.

he went on:

. . . in all cases pain as pain represents tension, a state of feeling, that is, from which there is a tendency to change; pleasure represents so far equilibrium or a state in which there is a tendency to persist.

Hardy, while recognising the importance of pleasure and pain in determining motives, regards the intellect as the most fruitful source of change. His own definition, whose "rather vague import" he admits, is not opposed to Stephen's, but its stress is different:

Discover for how many years, and on how many occasions, the organism, Society, has been standing, lying, etc, in varied positions, as if it were a tree or a man hit by vicissitudes.

There would be found these periods:

1. Upright, normal, or healthy periods.
2. Oblique or cramped periods.
3. Prostrate periods (intellect counterpoised by ignorance or narrowness, producing stagnation).
4. Drooping periods.
5. Inverted periods. 1.

It is difficult to make much sense of all these categories, and especially of the last; but the third, in which intellect is "counterpoised by ignorance or narrowness" would seem to represent the state of equilibrium. And if this is true we can see that for Hardy equilibrium was a negative state, whereas for Stephen it appears to have been positive. One may imagine that the "drooping" and "inverted" periods are those during which ignorance or apathy are stronger than the forces of intellect, those periods which are "upright" representing stages when the force of intellect achieves its greatest strength. The

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third period, being transitional, represents the one state in which human initiative may be decisive and the delicate counterbalance destroyed by conscious action. We have seen, too, in Hardy's "Apology", that there is stress on the intellect, in loving-kindness "operating through scientific knowledge". It is my belief that The Dynasts and the novels, in differing degrees, reveal the superiority of intellect over ignorance, apathy, or "narrowness", this last taking many forms. It may be the narrowness of Napoleon, who becomes blinded by his vision of a personal destiny, or the narrowness of Michael Henchard, who is blinded by his mercenary self-centredness, and by the powerful forces of his own instincts. In The Dynasts intellect is the property of the European nations, who struggle, consciously if imperfectly, towards some kind of personal freedom; in The Mayor it is the property of Farfane and Elizabeth-Jane, who attempt to adjust their own skills and attitudes to their fortunes and the changing community about them.

For it is in adjustment, and the recognition of change as inevitable, that intelligence lies. Again, the root of the perception is from Darwin; but its blossoming may be due to Leslie Stephen:

. . . the theory of evolution brings out the fact that every organism, whether social or individual, represents the product of an infinite series of adjustments between the organism and its environment. In other words, that every being or collection of beings which forms a race or a society is part of a larger system; that it is a product of the continuous play of a number of forces constantly shifting

and re-arranging themselves in the effort to maintain the general equilibrium. 1.

The question of freewill in Hardy's novels may, in the light of these points, be seen to resolve itself somewhat. Firstly, we may find actions whose course is determined solely by what one might call the historical environment: by the consequences of actions already undertaken and of present actions taken deliberately in such a way as to disturb equilibrium. The effectiveness of actions is another question: their effectiveness will be determined entirely by the extent to which they are in accord with the environment, historical and natural, in which they are undertaken. Many of Henchard's actions are self-willed and voluntary, but cannot succeed because they are opposed to his environment. Farfrae, on the other hand, makes himself a part of them; and it is because of this that he succeeds where Henchard fails. The attitude to be taken may be illustrated from a real-life example: a Finn was once asked whether his country was independent, in view of the fact that many of her policies are dominated by the presence of her Russian neighbour; he replied, "You must not mistake limited independence for lack of independence". In the same way, we should not mistake the limited freewill of Hardy's characters for lack of freewill.

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1. The Science of Ethics, pp. 33-4.

The same pattern is revealed in The Dynasts. Hardy appears to see the Revolution as an enlightened attempt to disturb the prevailing equilibrium, and to force events in the direction away from stagnation. Without being blind to the consequences of revolution -- he admits, for example, that Napoleon "crushed its final horrors" -- he nonetheless recognises it as a genuine expression of human aspirations, and condemns Napoleon for his failure to adapt himself to these aspirations. Napoleon's career is presented as falling into two phases, one positive, the other totally negative and destructive:

. . . 'twere better far
Such deeds were nulled, and this strange man's career
Wound up . . . For the large potencies
Instilled into his idiosyncrasy --
To throne fair Liberty in Privilege' room --
Are taking taint, and sink to common plots
For his own gain.

(Fore-scene)

The historical environment in which Napoleon finds himself is presented in terms of a historical determinism based upon consequence, and upon united action:

Thus do the mindless minions of the spell
In mechanized enchantment sway and show
A Will that wills above the will of each,
Yet but the will of all conjunctively...
 (III,i,5).

The minions are mindless at this point because they are unaware of the nature of the forces that grip them; in no way is it implied that they are not responsible for those forces. Later, when Napoleon is overthrown, his

overthrow is explicitly shown to be the outcome of a conscious wish:

Yea, the dull people and the Dynasts both,
Those counter-castes not often adjustable,
Interests antagonistic, proud and poor,
Have for the nonce been bonded by a wish
To overthrow thee.

(III,vii,9).

Earlier Ney warns Napoleon that his people have

judged the future by the accustomed past . . .
 They see the brooks of blood that have flowed forth;
 They feel their own bereavements. . .

(III,iv,4)

The irony of The Dynasts, of course, is that the people are hoodwinked in their efforts: the "mouldy thrones" are restored. But it is a poem about human development within an evolutionary frame, and evolution is an extremely slow process: the peoples still "plod on/ Through hoodwinkings to light" (III,iv,4). Other poems, most notably "The Sick Battle-God" and "A Plaint to Man",¹ make it clear that at the heart of Hardy's hopes for the future was a belief in the influence of human reason over the evolution of mankind and the organism of which each individual forms a part. It is essentially a hope for collectivist action, which in turn must be based upon individual perception. He held this view even after the crisis of the First World War, and expressed it in a letter to J.H.Morgan in 1924:

. . . there is in my opinion a real hope that
 the League of Nations may result in something --
 for a reason which apparently (I say it with great

1. C.P. 88 & 306 respectively.

deference) neither Lord M~~or~~ley nor yourself perceived, or at least cared to consider -- the ~~the~~ self-interest of mankind. Principalities & powers will discern more & more clearly that each personality in them stands himself to lose by war, notwithstanding a promise of gain at first, & this thought will damp prime movers down to moderators. 1.

What, then, of the "longing for annihilation" which we have briefly noted above? It would appear to fit some of Hardy's characters: possibly Henchard, possibly Jude. Is there any conflict of ideas here?

I believe there is. It seems to me that Hardy recognised the necessity of adaptation to the human environment, and at the same time admired the strength of those who attempted to break through the limitations of necessity. He recorded a review of Carlyle from The Spectator which presented life in just such terms:

Carlyle showed us how small a proportion of our life we can realise in thought; how small a proportion of our thoughts we can figure forth in words . . . how vast the forces around which the human spirit struggles for its little modicum of purpose . . . how, in spite of this array of immensities, the Spirit whose command brings us into being requires of us the kind of life which defies necessity. 2.

The tragedy, often, in Hardy is the destruction of personal aspirations because they arise in an environment which is unsuited to their fulfilment, and the tragic action consists of the struggles to escape from the necessity of adaptation. In 1885 Hardy gave the view

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1. Thomas Hardy to John Hartman Morgan, April 21, 1924. Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
2. Literary Notebooks, I. From The Spectator, April 18, 1862.

that tragedy "exhibits a state of things in the life of an individual which unavoidably causes some natural aim or desire of his to end in catastrophe when carried out",¹ and in 1895 he ~~re~~expressed this idea still more explicitly:

Tragedy may be created by an opposing environment, either of things inherent in the universe, or of human institutions. If the former be the means exhibited and deplored, the writer is regarded as impious; if the latter, as subversive and dangerous; when all the while he may never have questioned the necessity or ~~necessity~~ ^{urged} the non-necessity of either... 2.

His normal method, and this is of course especially true of the later novels, is to present a character encompassed by both social and universal obstacles. As far as social obstacles are concerned, the personal plea which ends the note is somewhat ingenuous: it is highly unlikely that any reader of Tess or Jude will accept that Hardy had no strong views on the necessity of social change, and the non-necessity of some existing social institutions. And even against the charge of impiety Hardy was, perhaps, on weak ground. In abandoning the Divine Order he chose to attempt to discover another order which seemed truer ~~than~~ the facts of existence: and he virtually recreated a scientific Chain of Being in which every tiny link contributed to the whole. The biggest difference between the old order and the natural order which he ~~gave~~ was that the new order possessed no special significance or purpose, and that man, so far from being an instrument of purpose,

1. Life, p. 176.

2. Life, p. 274.

was now responsible for creating a sense of direction and an aim.

If the term "Fate" means anything in relation to Hardy's work, then, we may see it as representing a combination of different forces. The first of these is the inherent nature of the universe: its dependence upon evolution as a means of change, and the necessity of change in all things; the passage of time, bringing with it the processes of decay and, among human beings, the impossibility of retrieving lost ~~man~~ opportunities. In this intellectual generalisation Hardy could obviously apply his own personal experience. Secondly, we can discern historical necessity, the inevitable limitations imposed upon human actions by consequence, and the inevitability of a future dependent in the same way upon the consequences of present actions. Thirdly, the requirement that, to be effective, human actions must be adapted to the environment, and the certainty that actions which refuse to take the environment into account are doomed to failure. The human resources which may be set against these limitations are consciousness and the gift of foresight, however imperfect; the opportunity afforded by the state of equilibrium to channel events into a new course; and the gift of human intellect, making it possible to develop new methods of coping with, and even of altering man's environment. It is no easy way which Hardy offers. Writing of Nietzsche he comments:

He assumes throughout the great worth intrinsically of human masterfulness. The universe is to him

a perfect machine which only requires thorough handling to work wonders. He forgets that the universe is an imperfect machine, and that to do good with an ill-working instrument requires endless adjustments and compromises. 1.

But at least the personal will is an instrument, and humanity must make the best possible use of it. Setting aside all the natural limitations imposed upon human behaviour, there remain only the self-imposed limitations of which Hardy wrote in his poem "Thoughts at Midnight":²

Mankind, you dismay me . . .
 Acting like puppets
 Under Time's buffets;
 In superstitions
 And ambitions
 Moved by no wisdom,
 Far-sight, or system,
 Led by sheer senselessness
 And presciencelessness
 Into unreason
 And hideous self-treason . . .

The novels deal with these acts of self-treason, as well as with Fate in the terms defined above. And of course the novels were written parallel to the pattern of thought we have outlined above, and indeed their writing must have contributed to the development of Hardy's ideas more powerfully, perhaps, than anything except personal experience. The novels face, too, one aspect of human conduct which appears little in Hardy's notes: but the drive of sexuality and its pressure on human conduct is a force of which Hardy was aware through his own instincts and experience. The knowledge of sexual necessity which Hardy displays is the result of an instinctive tact, and

1. Life, p. 364.

2. C.P. 798.

is not derived from an act of intellectual understanding. And certainly, as we now turn to the novels, we cannot expect that Hardy's intellectual development will provide adequate terms in which to interpret them. Instead his mature thought offers us a standpoint from which to approach the works; in particular, we know from the dates of Hardy's career that although his attitude to human conduct was not precisely ~~formally~~ formulated until he came to The Dynasts -- and even after that, under the particular influence of the First World War, it wavered -- his attitude to the human environment was formed early and remained substantially the same until his death. This uniformity makes our task easier, and we can expect to find the novels approaching the conclusion that

The truth should be told, and the fact be faced
That had best been faced in earlier years:

The fact of life with dependence placed
On the human heart's resource alone,
In brotherhood bonded close and graced

With lovingkindnes fully blown,
And visioned help unsought, unknown. 1.

Nonetheless, we should also be prepared to find work whose content is not dictated by wholly intellectual procedures; and whatever modification of Hardy's ideas we may find can be explained precisely in terms of Hardy's emotional bitterness and the ~~xxx~~ collapse of the dearest hopes of his career.

T H E N O V E L S

From his work I get few of the meanings, pessimistic or otherwise, that are commonly ascribed to him. His purpose seems to have been to tell about human life in terms that would present it as most recognisably, and validly, and completely human. 1.

A discussion of Hardy's beliefs has been conducted with small reference to the novels purely because the novels themselves have aroused controversy in this respect. Hardy's indignation at critical interpretations of his opinions is well known, but not entirely justified: he so clearly writes with a set of more or less established moral principles -- or at least moral attitudes -- in mind, and he introduces them into the mouths of his characters and his commentary on them, with such frequency that it becomes impossible to ignore them. They affect our response to the work, and the manner and frequency with which they are introduced are often cited as Hardy's principal weakness. The nature of the controversy can be fairly easily stated: it has been almost unanimously agreed that Hardy's works are tragedies of Fate rather than tragedies of character, but there is less unanimity about the extent to which this supposed emphasis on Fate damages the artistic validity of Hardy's work. The most extreme statement came from J.S.Smart in 1922:

~~Hardy~~ insists upon the external causes of disaster, the strange perversities of

1. Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy's Fiction", collected in Hardy: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. A.J.Guerard, Englewood Cliffs, 1963, pp. 10-24.

Nature, Fate, and Chance. His characters are brought to ruin by events over which they have no control, suffer for the sins of others, become the playthings of a blind, irresponsible power . . . The mystery of the world may not be solved by a belief in a divine guidance which visibly brings out all things for good. But neither is it solved by postulating an all-powerful being endowed with the baser human passions, who turns everything to evil, and rejoices in the mischief he has wrought. 1.

This criticism goes beyond the question of artistic validity, and into the realm of personal opinion, and Hardy was right to exclaim that Smart's views were "ludicrous".² He went out of his way to refute such interpretations of his work from the beginning to the end of his career, even including his refutation in the dialogue of Jude:

'We must conform!' she said mournfully.
'All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!'

'It is only against man and senseless circumstance,' said Jude.

'True!' she murmured. 'What have I been thinking of! I am getting as superstitious as a savage! . . .'

3.

Yet no point of view which sees Hardy's characters as wholly responsible matches our experience of them, because, patently and systematically, he sets out to portray a world which, in its laws or tendencies, is indifferent or hostile to men. The question which remains is whether that world is one whose limitations on human action are only partial limitations, as Hardy

1. Essays and Studies, VII, 1922.

2. Life, pp. 243-4.

3. Jude, VI-iii.

the man seems to have believed; or whether Hardy the novelist presented characters without freedom. This is not merely speculative questioning: on the answers depends a just appreciation of Hardy's work. Those who believe that his characters have no freedom do so because Hardy has placed considerable stress on causality, and some, like E.M. Forster, believe this to be detrimental to his characterisation:

Hardy arranges his events with emphasis on causality, the ground plan is a plot, and the characters are ordered to acquiesce in its requirements . . . They are finally bound hand and foot, there is ceaseless emphasis on fate, and yet, for all the sacrifices made to it, we never see the action as a living thing . . . the characters have been required to contribute too much to the plot; except in their rustic humours, their vitality has been impoverished, they have gone dry and thin. This, so far as I can make out, is the flaw running through Hardy's novels: he has emphasised causality more strongly than his medium permits. 1.

There is a very real concern here for character, for the "philosophy" -- perhaps we should merely say the ground-plan -- of the novels, and for the medium. Barbara Hardy shows the same concern in The Appropriate Form,² but comes to a very different conclusion. She writes of Jude the Obscure:

Hardy . . . succeeds in combining animated and realistic psychology with ideological pattern. His story also depends on an arrangement of an action which reflects his general conclusions about the universe. This is the world without a Providence, where there is no malignant

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1. Aspects of the Novel, London (Penguin), 1962, pp. 100-101.
 2. London, 1964, pp. 70-1.

President of the Immortals, but conditions in nature and society which, in the absence of Providence, work together to frustrate energy and intelligence.¹ Those who best serve the life-force, like Arabella, prosper best, but those who have imagination and aspiration meet with the frustrations of nature's blind biological purpose and society's conventional restrictions.

This offers a very sensible definition of "Fate" in the novels, but it is interesting to note that Jude, which Mrs Hardy praises for its animated and realistic psychology, is also the novel which Mr Forster and others regard as a failure. The whole question of the characters' freedom of action, and the significance or lack of significance of their moral qualities, is thus disputed ground; and the dispute is to a very large extent centred on the appropriateness of Hardy's chosen form.

It will be obvious, I think, to any reader of Hardy that his chosen form relies in part on the author's voice, the so-called "intrusion" which enables him to generalise from events, or to interpret actions for us. Hardy's generalisations discuss the moral order against which the plot is set -- the most famous instance being the 'Aeschylean phrase' about the 'President of the Immortals'. The question arises whether these intrusions are in fact concerned with causality, or whether they are in some way intended to illuminate the characters more fully. Generally we have assumed that causality is their concern, the "ceaseless emphasis on fate" of Mr Forster, but this makes little sense to me. My

1. At this point Mrs Hardy comments in a footnote: "Those of us who share Hardy's metaphysical beliefs must still observe that Jude suffered from being born before the rise of the meritocracy", which is the first time I have noticed any critic approach Hardy on his own metaphysical terms.

recollection, at least, of the novels is always in terms of people, and of scenes with people in them, and not of events, and surely Hardy's concern was the same. Which is easier to recall, the plot of Far From the Madding Crowd or the character of Gabriel Oak? And why, in three of his major novels, does Hardy choose names for his titles: -- Jude, Tess, the Mayor, each of them given some relationship with their natural or hereditary environment? These are figures which inhabit our imagination long after the precise details of their careers have disappeared from our memory. Hardy even adds sub-titles -- "A Man of Character", "A Pure Woman" -- as if to focus our attention on the figures and their moral qualities. So we are compelled to say that Hardy succeeded in creating archetypal figures in spite of (how often these words are used of Hardy!) his intrusions. ~~This is~~ impossible: when we realise just how present Hardy's voice is in the novels, and how much his comment is centred upon individuals and their reactions, we are forced to concede that the intrusions have an effect more subtle and pertinent than we generally care to admit.

The real issue was touched upon by Dorothy van Ghent when she wrote "with the 'Aeschylean phrase' on the sport of the gods we feel again that intrusion of commentary which belongs to another order of discourse";¹ but she boldly presupposes that we already have a clear understanding of the "order of discourse" which is Hardy's habitual medium. Such an understanding is not easily come by, and will be even more difficult to reach if we insist on the

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1. "On Tess of the D'Urbervilles", collected in Guerard, Hardy, A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 77-90.

exclusion of the author's voice. Hardy's voice is essential, for through it we find a continually changing perspective, being guided at times to identification with his characters, but more frequently finding ourselves pushed towards detachment. There are many elements which contribute towards this process of distancing. There is that side of Hardy's art which we call "primitive", in the best sense: his reliance on traditional themes, the close kinship between his art and the ballad, and his stress on the function of the novelist as a "tale-teller",¹ only justified in adopting his role if he has an unusual and striking story to relate. There is the importation of the language of science and philosophy into an ancient structure, and the viewing of old ballad themes through eyes conditioned by Darwinism, agnosticism, and modern scientific theory. And between these two extremes there is the voice of the local historian, recording the landscape and sometimes the actual histories of the people of Wessex.

The reliance on traditional forms accounts for certain features which may be regarded as strengths or weaknesses -- and just which depends very largely on the critic's point of view. A point of view which demands developing characters, for example, might look upon Hardy's work with disfavour; whereas a critic like Donald Davidson sees in the "fixed" characters a powerful source of Hardy's strength. Similarly, the reliance on vigorous action, with little stress on

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1. See Hardy's note on fiction, Life, p. 252.

analysis or psychological motivation, and a greater stress on vigour than on probability, may also derive from traditional sources. "The miraculous, or nearly miraculous, is what makes a story a story, in the old way."¹ Such miraculous elements have caused difficulty, though I am at a loss to know why. Morton Dauwen Zabel writes² that they are "likely to make the suspension of disbelief a resentful ordeal", and cites the wife-selling in The Mayor of Casterbridge as an example. This seems to me to betray a great deal of over-sophistication, and, as happens in this case, a reluctance even to believe facts. A critic of Hardy should not be so ignorant of the background of the novels that he is unaware that wife-sales are an attested fact of nineteenth-century history.³ What is more important here is that this scepticism is based on a complete misreading of Hardy's narrative method: it is pertinent to remind ourselves that any mythical tale may establish itself on facts beyond natural experience, and that Hardy's tales embody powerful mythical and fabular elements. Hardy did not attempt to write along realistic lines, and he has said so:

The real, if unavowed, purpose of fiction is to give pleasure by gratifying the love of the uncommon in human experience, mental or corporeal . . . human nature must never be made abnormal, which is introducing incredibility. The uncommonness must be in the events... 4.

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1. See Davidson, (to whom this discussion is indebted), Guerard, Hardy, A Collection . . ., p. 17.
 2. Guerard, op.cit., pp. 38-9.
 3. See, for example, The Ladies Companion, 1805, and The Times, March 4, 1833. Further examples are adduced in Notes and Queries, February 17, 1951, and in seven subsequent issues (indexed).
 4. Life, p. 150.

He added that it was the writer's task to make the uncommon credible -- which in The Mayor he did -- but his stress is clear to see; and the terms in which he defines fiction are quite plainly not the terms in which Zabel defines it. Hardy's tales are not the tales of a realist, but are fabular in conception, underpinned by the use of local superstition, folk-lore, and magic, and a world is created which, just as it is only a little removed in time from Hardy's world, is also removed from the "real" world of everyday. It is a different, removed world, imaginative rather than realistic, however recognisable much of it may be; and in accepting Hardy's idiom we are accepting an idiom which is different, not merely from our own, but from that of Hardy's contemporaries.

It is his extension of this removed world which is the true source of the difficulties facing modern critics as they approach him, but it is also an undeniable source of his strength. Had he confined himself solely to the rewriting of traditional tales -- and his own testimony is that he used narratives which were related to him or which had been current in his own family¹ -- it is doubtful whether he would ever have been more than a romantic provincial dealing in stock reconstructions. What lends sympathy and understanding to his creation of character is precisely his refusal to treat his characters only as imaginative revivals. He injects into the older

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1. See, for example, Black and White, August 27, 1892: "I suppose . . . all your characters are drawn from life?" -- "Oh yes, almost all of them. Tess...Mr. Clare...Shepherd Oak...Bathsheba Everdene... Joseph Pooregrass, Eustacia, ...Susan Honsuch . . ."

world a vein of rationalism, setting modern ideas and sentiments beside the old-world traditional landscape and its people. He may even be said to be exploiting his own instinctive sympathies for narrative purposes, deliberately subjecting ways of life and thought to the light of the new "rationalism". This emerges partly through characterisation, the placing of fixed, undeveloping characters, whose fortunes leave them unchanged, beside the developing, changeable characters of the new world: Gabriel Oak and Jude are in many respects similar, but Oak's unchanging steadfastness preserves his integrity, whereas Jude's adventure into modernity destroys him. Or we can think of the obvious example of Henchard set beside the modern Farfrae. It is important to see Hardy's characters in juxtaposition with one another, for even at this level, the stage-managing of characters, Hardy is adopting an "order of discourse" which is paralleled in the poems: an order which, if it is to be clearly expressive, demands a dialogue or a conflict between different modes of existence. Hardy's commentary reflects his attempt to subject older ways to rigorous examination, and to present his readers with several different perspectives, and I am not sure that we should not expect a state of tension between the neutrality of the ballad tale and the deliberate absence of neutrality often implied in the author's voice; as if Joan Durbeyfield's "'tis nater, after all, and what do please God" represents not merely her own complacency, but the relaxed attitude of a way of life which could no longer meet and withstand the greater pressure of a moral order which places responsibility

solely upon man's ale**bt**ness.

Nonetheless, we are still entitled to demand that an author's statements be true, ~~not~~ to his ~~opinions~~ opinions or our own, but to the tale he is telling; and sometimes Hardy's attitude is not entirely clear. At the sociological level, for example, there is the straightforward question of sexual morality. The ~~seduction~~ seduction of Tess, "but for the world's opinion . . . would have been simply a liberal education";¹ Hardy is at pains to stress Tess's kinship with the oozing fertility of the Froom valley; yet Alec d'Urberville is seen and judged largely through the world's eyes, even though (or perhaps because) Hardy may have intended to draw no more than the anonymous seducer of the t**ra**diti**o**nal ballad. A similarly ambiguous approach is to be found in Jude. Hardy clearly states the nature of the kinship between Jude and Arabella:

. . . there was a momentary flash of intelligence, a dumb announcement of affinity in posse between herself and him, which, so far as Jude Fawley was concerned, had no sort of premeditation in it. She saw that he had singled her out ~~from~~ ^{place} from the three, as a woman is singled out in such cases, for no reasoned purpose of further acquaintance, but in common obedience to conjunctive orders ~~from~~ ^{place} from headquarters, unconsciously received by u**nf**ortunate men when the last intention of their lives is to be occupied with the feminine. 2.

The statement is clear and unequivocal; yet Arabella ~~is~~ more harshly treated by her creator than any other of Hardy's characters -- or is she? Critics ~~have~~ seen in her the most od**io**us of Hardy's women, and there are some indications that he agreed with them. Yet he makes Sue, for whom his sympathies are strong, feel an**d** instinctive

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1. Tess, Ch. XV.

2. Jude, I-vi.

liking for her.¹ Is there a real ambiguity here, or has it merely been inferred by critics who themselves represent the opinion of "the world"? Or, finally, is Hardy himself torn between the wish to display the instinctual power of sexuality, and his own conditioning by the world? The case seems to me less clear than with Alec d'Urberville, where there appears to be a breakdown of communication between the commentary and the tale, but the question does arise.

Yet when there is no failure of communication the commentary can be extremely effective. As long as we regard it as an exploration of the human environment, and attempt to relate it integrally with the tale he is telling, we have a standard which can be applied to his tale, to the symbolism which he uses, and to his use of traditional material. At their best we find Hardy's novels to be working as a complete organism, in which social conventions are judged according to their ability to co-exist with and offset the difficulties inherent in the environment. The rejection of social standards evident in Tess and Jude is made because society's standards fail to correspond with the natural environment, and yet bring no comfort to it; and conduct may be judged according to the same standard. The function of the commentary is to explore the relation between society or individuals and Hardy's universe, and it stands at one extreme from the ballad tale. Between the extremes we look to Hardy's symbolism as the power which fuses the tale and commentary, and a clear illustration of this is found in Tess. At the

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1. Jude, V-iii.

time of Tess's seduction Hardy introduces the notions of heredity and retribution, and he does so in his own voice:

Why ~~was~~^{it was} that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousands of years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of ~~retribution~~^a retribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess d'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from ~~the~~^a fray had dealt the same measure even more ruthlessly towards peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter.

As Tess's own people down ~~there~~ in those retreats never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: 'It was to be'. There lay the pity of it . . . 1.

There is a great deal of complexity here, as indeed there is in the whole episode of Tess's seduction; but for the moment it is enough to note that considerations of heredity, already present in the novel, are again brought forward. When one recalls that Tess's companions at the dairy include at least one other scion of a formerly noble family, it is easy to say that the past greatness of Tess's race is a mere red herring, a useful piece of machinery for the plot and no more. But Hardy does not do things so casually; and the suggestion that her instincts are as much the property

of her race as of herself is decisively put in Chapter XLVII:

Her face had been rising to a dull crimson fire while he spoke; but she did not answer.

'You have been the cause of my backsliding,' he continued, stretching his arm towards her waist; 'you should be willing to share it, and leave that mule you call husband for ever.'

One of her leather gloves, which she had taken off to eat her skimmer-cake, lay in her lap, and without the slightest warning she passionately swung the glove by the gauntlet directly in his face. It was heavy and thick as a warrior's, and it struck him flat on the mouth. Fancy might have regarded the act as the recrudescence of a trick in which her armed progenitors were not unpractised. Alec fiercely started up from his reclining position. A scarlet ooze appeared where her blow had alighted, and in a moment the blood began dropping from his mouth upon the straw. But he soon controlled himself, calmly drew his handkerchief from his pocket, and mopped his bleeding lips.

She too had sprung up, but she sank down again. New para. ['Now punish me!', she said, turning up her eyes to him with the hopeless defiance of the sparrow's gaze before its captor twists its neck. 'Whip me, crush me; you need not mind those people under the rick! I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim -- that's the law!'

The passage is extraordinarily effective, not least because it combines the violence and passivity of Tess's nature, both of which are stressed before and after this scene. Only "Fancy" suggests in her action the actions of her forbears -- a notable example of Hardy's tact in handling an episode of this sort -- yet later, after the murder is committed, Angel Clare wonders "what obscure

strain in the d'Urberville blood had led to this aberration -- if it were an aberration. There momentarily flashed through his mind that the family tradition of the coach and murder might have arisen because the d'Urbervilles had been known to do these things."¹ Yet it is not merely the hereditary strain in Tess which is underlined. The change in social prestige of her race is -- again~~nt~~ tactfully -- stressed also: the leather gloves, once the symbol of might, and now only the protection against heavy labour, temporarily removed while she ate her skimmer-cake -- a dumpling made of surplus dough,² and hardly the ancient fare of the d'Urbervilles. The trapped birds who more than once are paralleled with Tess's fate make their re-appearance in her 'hopeless defiance', and her role as victim is strangely juxtaposed with the astonishing violence just shown. The juxtaposition is also stressed in Hardy's commentary, this time in relation to the eviction of the Durbeyfield family:

. . . Thus the Durbeyfields, once d'Urbervilles, saw descending upon them the destiny which, no doubt, ~~when~~ they were among the Olympians of the county, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landless ones as they ~~were~~ now. So do flux and reflux -- the rhythm of change -- alternate and persist in everything under the sky. 3.

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The point which underlies these instances is that Hardy's commentary is, at its best, as much part of the story as the plot; parallel to it, it stresses the

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1. Tess, LVII.
2. English Dialect Dictionary.
3. Tess, I.

broader implications of his theme, without distracting from that theme or blurring the bold lines in which the ballad tale is sketched, and the symbolism provides the link between the ballad tale and its modern implications. An approach of this kind explains, though it does not justify, even such passages as Tess's remark that this world is one of the blighted planets;¹ a remark which is out of place not because it is inappropriate to this tale, but to the speaker. The question of whether it is the author's opinion is irrelevant. Similarly the question of whether the successful passages of commentary represent his opinion is irrelevant also; what matters is the degree to which they conform to the tale: the 'Aeschylean phrase' may be regarded as a blatant expression of authorial opinion, but what is really important about it is that in its irony it calls into question the social judgement which pronounces Tess guilty, and, in its equally ironic association of the President of the Immortals with society's verdict, offers judgement not on any abstract conception of some higher ruling power, but on those who would assign Tess's fortunes to intervention, guidance, or sheer impassiveness on the part of such malignancy. The phrase is certainly ambiguous, but, since this is often a quality of irony, so is much of Hardy's art; and his purpose is not to explain, but to question ~~xx~~ social attitudes. His use of the pathetic fallacy, particularly in Tess, is as we shall see, another illustration of this ironic query. The commentary is, in other words, a device for removing the moral neutrality commonly found in the ballad form.

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1. Tess, IV. See above, p. 92.

Under The Greenwood Tree; A Pair of Blue Eyes.

The ambiguity which we have noted in the commentary is present throughout the early novels, affecting Hardy's treatment of his tale, his treatment of nature, and the response of his characters. Of Desperate Remedies we shall have little to say at this point. It is a strange work, and it deserves attention: but those qualities in it which are most remarkable are all foreshadowings of later techniques, and they are best seen in relation to Hardy's later prose. Moreover, in Under the Greenwood Tree we have an early work which displays an assurance which Hardy scarcely equalled in his later works. The concern with change, with the natural environment, and with female sexuality and passivity are all present; but they carry with them a mastery of prose which was scarcely intimated in Desperate Remedies. Undistorted by irrelevant generalisation, free from self-conscious literary references, and using its few symbols discreetly and naturally, it marks a consistency of sensibility never again equalled in Hardy. It is Hardy at his lightest, but in many senses it is Hardy at his best too. That the treatment of the rustics is occasionally patronising or facetious is admitted; yet such passages play a minor part in the novel and I do not propose to do more with them than note that they are there. It seems more fruitful to point to the qualities of proportion which belie the critical judgement that this is a slight work -- a judgement which Hardy regrettably seems to have accepted without demur.

The excellence of this brief work arises simply because, in telling a nostalgic tale of the decay of rustic life, Hardy infuses his theme with an idyllic delicacy which stresses the dignity of the disappearing way of life; at the same time he strikes a balance between an awareness of the value of what has been lost and an acknowledgement of decline. Landscape plays its part in this balance, since the rural sights and sounds which are Hardy's métier are not only closely allied with the human activity which goes on amidst them, but they are also lovingly and precisely handled. The tiny rural community is given its home and natural environment with tact and the minimum of self-consciousness, and we see rural life as being in itself a delicate and coherent organism:

The breeze had gone down, and the rustle of their feet and tones of their speech echoed with an alert rebound from every post, boundary-stone, and ancient wall ~~as~~ they passed, even where the echo's origin was less than a few yards. Beyond their own slight noises nothing was to be heard save the occasional bark of foxes in the direction of Yalbury Wood, or the brush of a rabbit among the grass now and then as it scampered out of their way. 1.

The posts, boundary-stones, and ancient walls mark silently the kinship of these people with the village past: they are men at home in their historical setting and as much a part of their natural environment as the plants and animals which surround them. Nature itself is ever-present, but its processes are taken for granted, introduced casually and naturally ("... and bunches of nuts could not be distinguished from the leaves which

nourished them"¹), and man is set in intimate proximity with and relationship to it. Sometimes this can be mildly disconcerting, as Enoch discovers, "shaking out another emmet that had run merrily up his thigh",² but natural processes are the environment, and must be worked with. Mr Day's bee-keeping is the most natural thing in the world, and the swarming of Dick Dewey's bees, quite apart from its favourable portent for his marriage,³ stresses his community with the local society and environment.

But of course that environment is insecure, and it is the insecurity which is Hardy's theme. For however idyllic Mellstock may be, it is not Arcady, and the impermanence of the ways of life is gently underlined, even ~~the~~ as the community is presented to us. As the characters are introduced they are given an air of unreality, and we are reminded that what we see is no more than a picture of the past, a loving reconstruction of ways now dead and gone. The sub-title, "A Rural Painting of the Dutch School", is intended to convey more than an impression of a homely, unpretentious narrative: it stands just as much for the basic unreality of the incidents. Our first meeting with Dick Dewey is in a wood where "all was as dark as the grave", and it is truly a voice from the grave that we hear. That voice, it is true, breaks into ancient song, recalling the kinship between human life and the seasons whose movement the book follows:

. . .with the rose and the lily
And the daffodowndilly
The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go,

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1. IV-1.
2. IV-iv.
3. Firor, p. 2.

but when Dick actually appears this living, vigorous presentation which the song conveys is momentarily abandoned, and he appears "on the light background like the portrait of a gentleman in black cardboard". We are no longer meeting a man, but a representation of something whose reality is past. The same is true of the Mellstock Quire:

They, too, had lost their rotundity with the daylight, and advanced against the sky in flat outlines, which suggested some processional design on Greek ~~and~~^{or} Etruscan pottery. 1.

Yet if they are no longer real in the flesh, they have their own kind of permanence, for the image of Greek and Etruscan pottery is double-edged. The choir may no longer possess its own reality, yet it does achieve immortality. The tale is invested with its own sense of the timeless, its nostalgias appeals to the immortalising powers of memory and legend, and in the integrity of the Mellstock Quire the survival of its members is sure. We are told so directly on our first entry into the gallery of the ancient church:

In the pauses of ~~the~~ conversation there could be heard through the floor overhead a little world of undertones and creaks from the halting clockwork, which never spread further than the tower they were born in, and raised in the more meditative minds a fancy that here lay the ~~direct~~ pathway of Time. 2.

The sounds of the clock are metaphorically allied to the members of the choir in the phrase "which never spread further than the tower they were born in". Time

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1. I-i.
2. I-v.

functions in this book in its traditional roles of preserved and destroyer. It is the progress of Time which threatens the existence of ancient ways and customs, just as it enshrines them. It is Time which Fancy brings into the village with her new ways, her astonishment at rustic habits and speech, and her reluctant re-alliance with them.

Yet Time is not the only force that threatens Arcady. As in Desperate Remedies, the heroine is invested with as much sexuality as the book allows. Her physical appearance, particularly at the dance in the tranter's home, is carefully indicated, and indeed enhanced by the sweaty neighbours who foot it with her. Her coquettishness, which she acknowledges and to some extent delights in, is a potentially subversive force, and in this and her possession of a secret which she is reluctant to reveal she foreshadows the later heroines. That last cool phrase -- "and thought of a secret she would never tell" -- carries in it the tragic germ of later plots, and with the benefit of hindsight we may see Fancy Day the coquette as the predecessor of Sue Bridehead, however different this idyll may be from Jude the Obscure in other respects.¹ This may be no more than biographical accident, for Fancy is almost certainly modelled on Tryphena Sparks. Like Tryphena, and like Sue, she is educated outside her normal environment, and brings into it destructive forces; she is a Queen's Scholar, and endowed with considerable intelligence. She has a child-like quality which is nowhere more stressed than in a single verb -- "0,0,0,

1. There are also a number of interesting parallels with The Woodlanders.

Dick!' she cried, trotting after him like a pet lamb"¹ -- a verb which recurs in A Pair of Blue Eyes, but which is most notably and consistently applied to Sue Bridehead in the last great novel. She occasionally suffers from the passivity common to so many of Hardy's women -- "she felt that she was in a measure captured and made a prisoner"² -- and in her coquetry she utters a sentence which might easily have been the property of Sue:

'Dick, I always believe flattery if possible -- and it was possible then. Now there's an open confession of weakness. But I showed no consciousness of it.'

3.

'I like to hear you praise me in that way, Dick', she said, smiling archly, 'It is meat and drink to a woman.'

4.

There are individual scenes, most notably in her conversation from the schoolroom window, which parallels ~~later~~ Sue's later relationship with Jude. These parallels in no way detract from Fancy's reality: they merely stress that Hardy's comparative failure in the portrait of Cytherea Graye has been overcome, almost certainly with the benefit of a living model, and that he is already on the path to the portraits of his maturity. That Fancy, unlike Sue, is ultimately reconciled to the society from which she drew her being is a measure of the degree of alienation which overtakes Hardy's heroes and heroines as he proceeds along his path as a novelist.

Fancy, of course, never reaches the point where her indiscretions can result in catastrophe: but the threat is there. There are other reminders, too, that we are not in Arcady. The natural environment surrounding

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1. III-iii.
2. III-i.
3. III-ii.
4. IV-v.

the community is natural in all its ways, and not all its ways are good:

. . . the stillness was disturbed only by some small bird that was being killed by an owl in the adjoining wood, whose cry ~~passed~~ ^{passed} into the silence without mingling with it. 1.

Other passages might easily be taken from Hardy's description of the much less idyllic setting of The Woodlanders, and possess equal maturity of approach:

A single vast gray cloud covered the country, from which ^{the} small rain and mist had ^{just} begun to blow ^{down} in ~~the~~ wavy sheets, alternately thick and thin. The trees of the fields and plantations writhed like miserable men as the air wound its way swiftly among them: the lowest portions of their trunks, that had hardly ever been known to move, were visibly rocked by the fiercer gusts, distressing the mind by its painful unwontedness, as when a strong man is seen to shed tears. Low-hanging boughs went up and down; high ~~and~~ erect boughs went to and fro; the blasts being so irregular, and divided into so many cross-currents, that neighbouring branches of the same tree swept the ~~others~~ in independent motions, crossed ^{/skies} each other, or became entangled. Across the open spaces flew flocks of green and yellowish leaves, which, after travelling ~~a~~ long distance from their parent trees, reached the ground and lay ^{there} with their undersides upward . . . 2.

Under the Greenwood Tree is characteristic of the later works in other respects too, and subtly so. The apparent incompatibility between the old world and the new is already obvious: the very fact that Fancy Day must make a choice suggests that it is not possible for the two worlds to live side by side permanently, and this is again suggested by the interview between the choir and the young

1. IV-ii.

2. IV-iii.

vicar. Faced with each other's difficulties, and understanding them, each party is nonetheless embarrassed and finds itself inadequate to meet the situation. The apparent failure caused by Hardy's introduction of Thomas Leaf into the discussion seems to me to be more of a screening device, allowing Hardy to present the mutual discomfort but at the same time allowing him to keep his distance from the deeper perceptions involved. The mutual uneasiness is there: anything deeper would have marred the book as we have it, and to demand an alternative treatment at this point is, I believe, to demand a different book.

There is, too, the real but lightly-handled knowledge of the inadequacies of rural life. Here Hardy's attention is centred on the "witch", Elizabeth Endorfield, whose pretence to common-sense is so much mistaken and wrongly-valued by the community. Hardy's comment here is instructive:

It may be stated that Elizabeth belonged to a class of suspects who were gradually losing their mysterious characteristics under the [administration of the young vicar; though during the long reign of Mr. Grinham the parish of Mellstock had proved extremely favourable to the growth of witches. 1.

Here is village superstition: the clumsiness in much village life is apparent during the party at the tranter's, at Dick's meeting with Fancy, and in the inscription on Dick's business-card, "Live and dead stock removed to any distance on the shortest notice".² The nostalgia for ancient ways is not critical nor naive.

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1. V-iii.
2. IV-vii.

But it is not unreal, either. The essential integrity of Mellstock is captured chiefly in the figure of old William, who exercises a humane discipline over the choir, who is throughout plainly the object of the author's sympathy, and whose immortality is suggested openly and directly:

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 ^{out} lines of imposing magnitude, his head finally terminating upon the trunk of a grand old oak-tree. 1.

The essential balance of the book is suggested at its close. The wedding-feast held with rustic simplicity in the open air, sheltered by a firm and ancient tree, and full of the reminders of birth and maturity of the natural world surrounding the bride. The omens appear fair; yet at the same time they are overshadowed by other presences. The tree itself has "quaint tiffs of fungi" in the forks of its branches, as if the old is already preparing for decay; Fancy's attention to dress and her concern lest older customs should seem unfitting, together with her insistence that the tranter should wear an ill-fitting pair of gloves on his awkward hands; and Enoch, the absent guest who refuses the invitation to the wedding, are all enough to shadow the end of this quiet tale, without throwing over it a disproportionate gloom. The last chapter, like the book, is a pleasing and delicate achievement.

The delicacy of this work may perhaps mask for us its unity with Hardy's later novels, but if so it is because greater stress is laid on the disappearance of the old way than on the plot per se, and it is Hardy's handling of rural decline that most seizes our imagination. Not, obviously, that this is absent from the later works, but that it is more in the forefront here, the lovers representing the old and the new ways respectively, and character as such plays a less notable part than in many of the books. We watch a community as eagerly as we watch individuals; though both are grappling with the problem of adaptation. At this point it is primarily adaptation to the man-made environment, to new, human, ideas of "progress". Though the darker side of the natural environment is presented, it is not stressed, and in general the community is in harmony with it. However, the plot, stated simply as a young woman's choice between two men, is the staple of the greater number of the Wessex novels; and it is substantially influential in A Pair of Blue Eyes. Where the crisis occurs it occurs because choice has to be made. For Fancy Day the choice is easier than for any other of Hardy's heroines, and her recognition of personal responsibility towards Dick Dewey comes with little difficulty, partly aided by Dick's meeting with the vicar, partly because hers is a choice between love and social status, rather than between an old love and a new. The choice for Elfride Swancourt is harder, both in itself -- Knight is in many respects superior to Stephen Smith, and Elfride's attachment to him is made to appear much more powerful and instinctive than Fancy's

brief flirtation with Mr Maybold -- and because of the circumstances which surround it. One may freely admit the presence of too many coincidences in the novel (H.C. Webster counted thirtyseven "major" coincidences¹), yet the crux of the book is still Elfride's power of decision and, to a lesser extent, the same power in Knight and Stephen Smith. In this A Pair of Blue Eyes resembles Desperate Remedies: there the whole book turns on the "accident" of a fire; but the fire could, and should, have been avoided by greater foresight on the part of Farmer Springgrove; and the consequences of the fire could, and should, have been avoided by a more urgent attention to the insurance policies which guarded the gutted row of cottages. No amount of coincidence affects the characters of Desperate Remedies so much as these two failures on the part of one man. Similarly, it is true that Elfride Swancourt is powerless against Henry Knight's selfish intolerance; but it is also true that but for her own actions with Stephen Smith, Knight's intractability would not have shown itself in such a disastrous form. And her decision to attempt an elopement with Stephen is based on a frivolity of behaviour that outweighs any interference by chance. Hardy makes this point quite explicitly:

. . . making one of those stealthy movements by which women let their hearts juggle with their brains, she did put the horse's head about, as if unconsciously, and went at a hand-gallop towards home for more than a mile. By this time, from the inveterate habit of valuing what we have renounced directly the alternative is chosen,

1. On A Darkling Plain, Chicago, 1947; reprint 1962, p. 104.

the thought of her forsaken Stephen recalled her, and she turned about, and cantered on to St. Launce's again.

This miserable strife of thought now began to rage in all its wildness. Overwrought and trembling, she dropped the rein upon Pansy's shoulders, and vowed she would be led whither the horse would take her.

Pansy slackened her pace to a walk, and walked on with her agitated burden for three of four minutes. At the expiration of this time they had come to a little by-way on the right, leading down a slope to a pool of water. The pony stopped, looked towards the pool, and then ~~and~~ advanced to drink. Elfride . . . was impatient. It seemed as if Pansy would never stop drinking; and the ~~repose~~ of the pool, the idle motions of the insects and flies upon it, the placid waving of the flags, ~~the~~ leaf-skeletons, like Genoese filigree, placidly sleeping at the bottom, by their contrast with her own turmoil made her impatience greater.

Pansy did turn at last, and went up the slope again to the high-road. The pony came upon it, and stood cross-wise, looking up and down. Elfride's heart throbbed erratically, and she thought, 'Horses, if left to themselves, make for where they are best fed. Pansy will go home'.

Pansy turned and walked towards St. Launce's.

Pansy at home, during ~~the~~ summer, had little but grass to live on. After a run to St. Launce's she always had a feed of corn to support her on the return journey. Therefore, being now more than half-way, she preferred St. Launce's.

But Elfride did not remember this now. All she cared to recognise was a dreamy fancy that to-day's rash action was not her own. She was disabled by her moods, and it seemed ~~strangely~~ indispensable to adhere to the programme. So strangely involved are motives that, more than by her promise to Stephen, more even than by her love, she was forced on by a sense of the necessity of keeping faith with herself, as promised in the inane vow of ten minutes ago. 1.

I have quoted this at length, since it contains the whole anatomy of Elfride's decision, and because the author's attitude is openly expressed: this is a "rash action", the

result of an "inane vow", followed at the command of a "dreamy fancy". Hardy's indirect commentary suggests the same verdict. The pool, in Elfride's eyes, is placid in marked contrast to her own feelings; but the insects upon it are noted for their "idle motions", the vegetation waves placidly in the wind -- and Elfride, by resigning her powers of choice, is equally idle and equally at the mercy of the winds of circumstance and the forces of cause and effect (Pansy heads for St. Launce's since her experience has taught her that more food is to be found there). In effect Elfride is aligning herself with lower orders of life, and the leaf-skeletons at the bottom of the pool may be intended to suggest the tragic result of such a refusal to decide. Certainly there is a quality of innocence and inexperience about her which may tend to disarm judgement -- Hardy tells us "she knew" no more about the stings of evil report than the native wild-fowl knew ^{of} ~~about~~ the effects of Crusoe's first shot"¹; but we are also given some clues to Elfride's character which force our judgement in the opposite direction. Elfride's "capacity for being wounded was only surpassed by her capacity for healing, which rightly or wrongly is by some considered an index of transientness of feeling in general";² "She dismissed the ^{sense of} sin in her past actions, and was automatic in the intoxication of the moment";³ "She never alluded to ^{even} a knowledge of Knight's friend";⁴ "Her natural

1. Ch. XII.
2. Ibid.
3. Ch. XXVII.
4. Ibid.

honesty invited her to confide in Knight... But she put it off";¹ "Her resolution . . . had been to tell the ^{whole} truth, and now the moment had come. . . . The moment had been too much for her".² And later, with much irony, "It was a particular pleasure for her to ^{be able to} do a little honesty without fear".³ I believe we are asked to recognise her action, or lack of action, as a piece of gratuitous folly. For Elfride is not innocent: she has already experienced the consequence of rashly encouraging a man in the past, and her former encouragement played its part in her eventual rejection by Knight. The young Jethway makes his influence felt very early in the book, and widow Jethway returns at vital intervals to sway the action. The machinery is clumsy, but the point is made: Elfride, whether she had deliberately encouraged Jethway or not, had led him to think he was being encouraged. In this she may not have been culpable: in her knowledge of the consequences, and her refusal or inability to learn from them, she was.

Her abandonment of Stephen is, of course, another matter. All the effects of the cliff-rescue and the emotional shock which follows it make her transition from one lover to another now inevitable. But even here the moment of decision is already past:

There before her lay the deposit-receipt for the two hundred pounds, and beside it the elegant present of Knight. . . . She almost feared to let the two articles lie in juxtaposition: so antagonistic were the interests they represented that a miraculous

 1. Ch. XXVII.
 2. Ch. XXVIII.
 3. Ibid.

repulsion of one by the other was almost to be expected. . . . By the evening she had ~~almost~~ come to a resolution, and acted upon it. The packet was sealed up -- with a tear of regret as she closed the case upon the pretty forms it contained -- directed, and placed upon the writing-table in Knight's room. And a letter was written to Stephen stating that as yet she hardly understood her position with regard to the money sent; but declaring that she was ready to fulfil her promise to marry him. After this letter ^{had been} ~~was~~ written she delayed posting it -- although never ceasing to feel strenuously that the deed must be done.

Several days passed . . . 1.

Hardy notes her steadfastness "in her opinion that honour compelled her to meet" Stephen, but goes on, "for she was markedly one of those who sigh for the unattainable -- to whom, superlatively, a hope is pleasing because not a possession," and she begins to see her projected renunciation of Knight as a virtue of self-sacrifice upon the altar of duty. There can be no question, of course, ~~of~~ Hardy believing that she should sacrifice herself to "honour" -- indeed, on the question of what she ought to do he is markedly reticent. The only implication which seems to be drawn is that having allowed her power of decision to become atrophied in one instance she has now opened up a pattern of ~~consequence~~ *consequence* which any further abdication of judgement will only aggravate. The dilemma ~~her~~ *isolates* is perfectly clear: marriage with Stephen is unlikely to prove ideal after her love for Knight, but a refusal to marry Stephen at this stage must lead inevitably not only to the loss of Stephen himself but also to the loss of Henry Knight.

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Decisions are not formed in a vacuum, however, and Elfride is not solely responsible for her fate. Whatever she decides is judged in a context which includes others, and most notably the two men who love her. Hardy's execution at this point is so inferior to his idea that the conflict of personalities is scarcely realised, if at all: Stephen Smith is a nonentity, and with Elfride's rejection of him his importance for the novel is virtually at an end. Yet in one respect he shows superiority over his rival: he at least accepts Elfride for what she is, and there is no vain attempt to force her to his will; "his tact in avoiding catastrophes was the chief quality which made him intellectually respectable, in which quality he far transcended Knight."¹ Knight, on the other hand, is obviously a first draft for Angel Clare, and in his idealisation of his own dreams, and his refusal to accept Elfride when she falls below his ideal, he bears more responsibility than any other figure. Here, too, Hardy is quite explicit:

It is a melancholy thought that men who at first will not allow the verdict of perfection they pronounce upon their sweethearts ~~and~~^{of} wives to be disturbed by God's own testimony to the contrary, will, once suspecting their purity, morally hang them upon evidence they would be ashamed to admit in judging a dog. 2.

The moral rightness of this man's life was worthy of all praise; but in spite of some intellectual acumen, Knight had in him a modicum of that wrong-headedness which is mostly found in scrupulously honest people. With him, truth seemed too clean and pure an abstraction to be so helplessly churned in with error as practical

1. Ch. XXVII.
2. Ch. XXXIV.

people find it. Having now seen himself mistaken in supposing Elfride to be peerless, nothing on earth could make him believe she was not so very bad after all. 1.

Knight is inconsistent: he condemns Elfride's love of adornment, but feels a sense of triumph in buying her the very ear-rings he professes to despise. He shows Stephen the surging mass of humanity living and working below his London office; but in his idealism he betrays an ignorance of real life, and demands the placid life of the fish-tank which decorated the interior of his room. And his "moral rightness" is not so very moral after all. He is no sooner saved from the cliff-fall by Elfride than he is conscious of the power of "a thorough drenching for reducing the protuberances of clothes, . . . Elfride's seemed to cling to her like a glove".² Like Angel Clare, his motives are underlaid by a repressed sexuality, hidden even from himself. This, together with the attraction for him of her "inexperienced state" puts the morality of his behaviour on a more questionable level, not because his sexuality is reprehensible, but because he treated Elfride not as a person but as a thing. Her plea, "Am I such a mere characterless toy?" is made with good reason. "Haven't I brains? . . . Have I not some beauty? . . . Yet all these together are so much rubbish because I -- accidentally saw a man before you!"³

Against this background, even allowing for Elfride's prevarication, his judgement over her grave becomes self-deceptive almost to the point of wickedness: "Can we call her ambitious? No. Circumstance, as usual, overpowered her purposes -- fragile and delicate as she --

1. Ch. XXXV.
2. Ch. XXII.
3. Ch. XXXII.

liable to be overthrown in a moment, by the coarse elements of accident". It is not difficult to find excuses for Elfride; it is easy to say that Smith was in some respects inferior to Knight; for Knight himself there can be no absolution. And if Hardy, at this point, asks us to accept Knight's judgement, he asks something which his own narrative has made impossible.

This is not to suggest that Circumstance plays no part in the novel. With the pattern of coincidence that permeates the book we need concern ourselves little: but it is there, it affects the course of the action. Yet it does not affect the responses of any major character at moments of decision, except to reinforce decisions already taken. Hardy himself points to the major coincidence of the book:

That Knight should have been thus constituted: that Elfride's second lover should not have been one of the great mass of bustling mankind, little given to introspection, whose good-nature might have compensated for any lack of appreciativeness, was the chance of things. That her throbbing, self-confounding, indiscreet heart should have to defend itself unaided against the keen scrutiny and logical power which Knight, now that his suspicions were awakened, would sooner or later be sure to exercise against her, was her misfortune. A miserable incongruity was apparent in the circumstances of a strong mind practising its unerring archery upon a heart which the owner of that mind loved better than his own. 1.

As Hardy suggests,² in this sense every meeting of two persons is attributable to circumstance. The point still

1. Ch. XXX.

2. Ch. XIII.

remains that Elfride could not have been subjected to Knight's "unerring archery" had she not herself first given a hostage to fortune by her own abdication of responsibility: in ludicrously resigning herself to the instincts of a horse she opens the door to the forces of cause and effect. And Knight is so concerned with his "dignity"¹ that he loses all sense of proportion and sympathy. These are no accidents, but regions in which human responsibility can reasonably be expected to play a part.

Lest this should seem an unduly harsh judgement of Hardy's characters, and one contrary to Hardy's intention, we should pause and consider the much-praised description of the accident on the Cliff Without a Name.² This is long, and it is self-consciously executed. But its length has a purely mechanical purpose -- the simple purpose of creating suspense, in which it is not particularly successful -- and its self-consciousness is perhaps the inevitable result of Hardy's close attention to the implications of the scene. It is sometimes read as an account of man's insignificance in the process of evolution: yet what it says is precisely the opposite. Knight, hanging on the cliff, finds himself face to face with "one of the early crustaceans called Trilobites", "the single instance within reach of his vision^{of anything} that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now". But the trilobite had not been saved. Its extinction is accounted for in terms which have an obvious relevance to man:

The creature represented but a low type of animal existence, for never in their vernal years had the

1. Ch. XXX.
2. Ch. XXII.

plains indicated by those ^{numberless} slaty layers been traversed by an intelligence worthy of the name.

And immediately after:

The immense lapses of time each formation represented had known nothing of the dignity of man.

If we accept that this scene shows us the insignificance of man, this sentence becomes a piece of gratuitous irony; and surely its point is that it is man's intelligence which gives him dignity, and Knight is here an illustration of it. He clings to the cliff "not with the frenzied hold of despair, but with a dogged determination to make the most of every jot of ~~his~~ endurance, and so give the longest possible scope to Elfride's intentions, whatever they might be". The cliff itself becomes a symbol of circumstance, and the conditions of Knight's struggle are openly paralleled with the condition of man:

To those musing weather-beaten West-country folk who pass the greater part of their days and nights out of doors, Nature seems to have moods in other than a poetical sense: predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them. She is read as a person with a curious temper; as one who does not scatter kindnesses and cruelties alternately, impartially, and in order, but heartless severities or overwhelming generousities in lawless caprice. Man's case is always that of the prodigal's favourite or the miser's pensioner. In her unfriendly moments there seems a feline fun in her tricks, begotten by a foretaste of her pleasure in swallowing the victim.

Such a way of thinking had been absurd to Knight, but he began to adopt it now . . . We are mostly accustomed to look upon all opposition

which is not animate as that of the stolid, inexorable hand of indifference, which wears out the patience more than the strength. Here, at any rate, hostility did not assume that slow and sickening form. It was a cosmic agency, active, lashing, eager for conquest: determination; not an insensate standing in the way.

The transition here is important: West-country people feel this way; Knight began to feel this; then the agency is "lashing, eager for conquest". Yet that this is obviously only Knight's train of thought, a result of extreme stress, we are told: the elements themselves seem more than usually angry, although the "rain was quite ordinary in quantity; the air in temperature". Finally, Hardy writes:

A fancy ~~that~~ some people hold, when in a bitter mood, is that inexorable circumstance only tries to prevent what intelligence attempts.

As Knight's trust in Elfride's ingenuity recedes so he becomes consciously more and more convinced of the cosmic agencies hostile to man, and the whole tenor of the second half of the passage is to reinforce the view that whatever is desired by man is withheld from him in a deliberate effort by Nature to tantalize him. But Knight is wrong: his ability to hold on to the cliff for so long has been due ~~only~~ to his trust in Elfride; and as his resolution reaches ~~its~~ end he is given new determination because Elfride does act. With presence of mind, forming ~~the~~ rope from her knotted underclothes, she shows how intelligence may overcome circumstance, and Knight grasps her lesson quickly:

'Now,' said Knight, who, watching ~~the~~ proceedings intently, had by this time not only grasped her scheme, but reasoned further on, 'I can hold

three minutes longer yet. And do you use the time in testing the strength of the knots, one by one'.

She at once obeyed, tested each singly by putting her foot on the rope between each knot, and pulling with her hands. One of the knots slipped.

'O think!', it would have broken but for your forethought!' Elfride exclaimed apprehensively.

So we have a novel in which there is continual stress on circumstance and the power of accident, but which can be read as an illustration of false choice; and at the heart of the novel as its most dramatic incident, and the one on which the author appears to have spent his greatest pains, we have a scene which stresses man's place in the evolutionary pattern, the power of the elements, and the power of circumstance -- and yet places its final stress on the defeat of those forces by human ingenuity.

There are many aspects which we have ignored. There is, for example, a tentative attempt to establish a pattern of imagery ~~xxx~~^{and} symbol which would reinforce the "circumstance motif", if it were successful, and in particular the beginnings of a scheme of proleptic imagery which foreshadows Elfride's eventual decline and death. For its lack of success we have chosen not to treat that here, though in the later novels, where its success is greater, we cannot ignore it, in Tess above all (and this work, with its concealed secret and intransigent lover, is obviously in close relationship to Tess). There is the same self-sacrificing heroine, and even at this early stage the suggestion that heredity exerts its influence on the heroine's character. Much of the schematic pattern

attempted in A Pair of Blue Eyes would lend weight to those who believe Hardy's characters to be without a defence against circumstance; but if read in this way it would make little sense of the action of the book, which as we have seen is as much concerned with motivation and the relationship between one person and another. A Pair of Blue Eyes, seen alone or in common with the later novels, shows the superiority of human intelligence in the evolutionary pattern, and attempts to show the strength of the forces which intelligence can, at its best, defeat. Elfride's tragedy is that her intelligence serves her only at a physical crisis, and then on behalf of a man who is primarily responsible for her defeat. In moral crises she has no intelligence at all.

One would like to add that Hardy's early books are immensely readable; but one cannot do so. Only Under the Greenwood Tree affords an ungrudged and consistent pleasure. But in Far From the Madding Crowd Hardy was to show so much gain from his early experience of writing that even Under the Greenwood Tree becomes lost among the works of an apprenticeship.

Far From the Madding Crowd.

Each of Hardy's earlier published novels had been written under special circumstances which to some extent interfered with success, and which certainly justify us in regarding them as experimental works. Desperate Remedies was a reaction against the first unpublished work The Poor Man and the Lady; and its adherence to the advice of George Meredith, with the consequent debt to Wilkie Collins, is not much to its advantage. Under the Greenwood Tree, a success, is so because Hardy was not drawn too deeply into an analysis of rural decline, and still more because he avoided any serious probing of a personal problem.¹ In A Pair of Blue Eyes Hardy did in fact begin to probe his personal experiences, disguising the young Tryphena Sparksxx beneath the features of his first wife, for example, and setting his work in Cornwall instead of Dorset. Even here, however, Hardy's chief problem was one of expression and setting: his feeling for the Cornish landscape, whatever it may have been to him after the death of his first wife, does not appear to be very deeply engaged, while his search for a way of expressing his conclusions about human conduct and choice is hampered because he is still dogged by his youthful conception of Chance and Coincidence, and has not yet absorbed it into a larger scheme. Against all this, Far From the Madding

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1. I accept Lois Deacon's view that the emotional relationships between Hardy, Tryphena, and Horace Moule form the basis for this early work. See Providence and Mr. Hardy, Ch. 9.

Crowd marks the end of an apprenticeship, and it has been seen as the "most characteristic" of Hardy's successful novels:¹ it has all the ingredients of a ballad tale, it strikes a balance between rural strength and rural weakness, its lovers are the three stock types -- the staunch, rejected lover, the passionately unstable man, and the philanderer; and in its attention to the great consequences of trivial beginnings it focusses most clearly upon one of the central preoccupations of Hardy's novels. Hardy appears to be more wholeheartedly engaged in this work than in any since Under the Greenwood Tree, and if it lacks the power of some of the later works this may be because his perspective here is more consistently maintained. Neither autobiographical matter nor ideological matter is allowed to dominate the tale. It is true that one of Hardy's aunts, Martha Sharpe, was the model for Bathsheba;² it is true that the novel possesses a strongly marked point of view about the meaning of 'good', i.e. beneficially productive, conduct. Yet these considerations are not allowed to affect the proportions of the novel, and indeed, it is to the moral point of view, and to Hardy's success in finding a correlation between individuals and the environment that the book owes its coherence. This said, we may do well to counter, firstly, the specific objection made by Henry James³ that the book is essentially a tale made inordinately long by superfluous padding;

1. See Roy Morrell, Thomas Hardy, The Will and the Way, Malay, 1965, pp. 59-72.

2. Notebooks, p. 48.

3. James's review is printed in Literary Reviews and Essays by Henry James, ed. A. Mordell, New York, 1957, pp. 291-7.

and secondly, it is instructive to discuss the general objections to Hardy's work made by T.S. Eliot.¹

James, in failing to see the organic nature of Hardy's rural society, failed to see the relevance of many of the rustic scenes, commenting:

Mr. Hardy's novel is very long, but his subject is very short and simple, and the work has been distended to rather formidable dimensions by the infusion of a large amount of conversational and descriptive padding, and the use of an ingeniously verbose and redundant style. It is inordinately diffuse, and as a piece of narrative singularly inartistic. The author has little sense of proportion, and almost none of composition. 2.

I take the term inartistic to imply substantially the same as a lack of proportion or composition; and as I understand James's criticism he is almost wholly concerned with the demands of the tale and the treatment given to it. Yet in general terms James had agreed with Walter Besant that fiction should have a "conscious moral purpose",³ and the proportions of Hardy's novel are wholly dictated by that purpose. He is not entirely successful in this -- the closing stages of Fanny Robin's career seem to be dwelt upon excessively -- but he is more successful than James has noted -- if, indeed, James noticed the moral purpose at all.

For Far From the Madding Crowd is a study of personal equilibrium within a specific, named society. It discusses the nature of equilibrium, and the effect of

1. After Strange Gods, London, 1934, pp. 54-8.

2. op.cit., p. 294.

3. See "The Art of Fiction", in Henry James, Selected Literary Criticism, ed. M. Shapiro, London, 1963, pp. 49-67.

a disturbance of equilibrium on individuals and society. Without seeing Weatherbury as a total organism I doubt whether one can make much sense of the work except at the ballad level: then, indeed, it appears inordinately padded. But Hardy appears to be fulfilling two of the requirements which James himself had laid down for the novel: he is recording an "impression of life", and in doing so he attempts to give an "air of reality" (solidity of specification)¹ to his work. The rural society which Hardy shows is in a state of equilibrium which retains much that is valuable of the old tradition. Yet equilibrium, which Hardy defines as "the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces",² is not a permanent state; it can be destroyed by a violent alteration of the balance, or by a slow decay of some of the forces which maintain it. Weatherbury is approaching the latter state, and some positive impetus is necessary before any wholesome balance, let alone any progress, may be re-established. That impetus is provided by the entry of Gabriel Oak into Weatherbury society; while a negative impetus is also provided by the influence of Sergeant Troy. Since much of Oak's significance lies in his role as restorer and preserver of society it is difficult to see how Hardy can escape a full discussion of the rural

1. "The Art of Fiction", p. 54: "A novel is in its broadest definition, a direct impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is more or less according to the intensity of the impression". See also p. 57: "the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel".

2. Ch. XVIII.

environment. Troy's case is perhaps less obvious, but his disruptive force is apparent, and not only in such incidents as the corruption of local labour and the consequent danger to Bathsheba's ricks.¹ Troy appears primarily as a lover, and the eventual husband of Bathsheba; and in his danger to Bathsheba lies his danger to the community. For of all Bathsheba's workmen, only Oak possesses or retains independence. Excepting him, the whole of Weatherbury Farm revolves around and depends upon Bathsheba's person. It is a simple question of economic dependence, but such questions are frequently vital to Hardy's plots, and in this instance the "mean bread-and-cheese question" is at the root of a rural order whose survival is closely-knit with the moral survival of its principal members. Indeed, the inter-relationship between environmental stability, economic stability, and moral stability is one of Hardy's most subtle and valuable perceptions.

That one aspect of the book is concerned wholly with the material well-being of its characters is implied by the praise which Hardy bestows on the great barn.² The barn, Hardy's composite of the great tithe barns of Cerne Abbas and Abbotsbury, represents rural continuity at its best, and its permanence is attributed directly to its purpose:

Standing before this abraded pile, the eye regarded its present usage, the mind dwelt upon its past history, with a satisfied sense

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1. Ch.XXXVI. The angelic qualities of Gabriel's name and the "Satanic symbolism" which surrounds Sergeant Troy suggest the roles that Hardy had in mind. See J.O. Bailey, "Hardy's Mephistophelian Visitants", PMLA, LXI, pp.1146-84.

2. Ch.XXII.

of functional continuity throughout -- a feeling almost of ~~gratitude~~, and quite of pride, at the permanence of the idea which had heaped it up. The fact that four centuries had neither proved it to be founded on a mistake, inspired any hatred of its purpose, nor given rise to any reaction that had battered it down, invested this simple grey effort of old minds with a repose, if not a **grandeur**, which a too curious reflection was apt to disturb in its ecclesiastical and military compeers. For once mediaevalism and modernism had a common standpoint. The lanceolate windows, the time-eaten/chamfers, the orientation of the axis, the ~~misty~~ ^{arch-stones and} work of the rafters, referred to no exploded ~~fortifying art or worn-out~~ ^{chestnut} creed. The defence and ~~religious~~ ^{religious} salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion, and a desire.

Yet when Hardy adds, "So the barn was natural to the shearers, and the shearers were in harmony with the barn", I doubt whether we are asked to see an order which is somehow inevitable for the countryside. His choice of words here is important: it is the barn, and what it stands for, that is natural. That the shearers are in harmony with it, that their purpose too is "the defence and salvation of the body by daily bread" is the result only of Oak's civilising influence. Some have seen Far From the Madding Crowd as the portrayal of a struggle between rural, or natural surroundings, and urban or civilised values;¹ this is a misleading simplification, perhaps caused by an irony (of which Hardy appears to have been unaware) in the title of the book. If the word "natural" is taken simply to mean "unaffected by civilisation, unsophisticated", then the nature, i.e. human nature, of Weatherbury folk is seen to be not merely unsophisticated, but inadequate and partially corrupt. On Oak's first arrival at Weatherbury the local folk reveal themselves

1. See especially Howard Babb, "Setting and Theme in Far From the Madding Crowd", ELH, 30, 2, 1963, pp. 147-61.

as "belonging to that class of society which casts its thoughts into the form of feeling, and its feeling into the form of commotion";¹ and it is Oak who saves Bathsheba's burning ricks. Oak's superior position on Bathsheba's farm is due largely to the dismissal of a thieving bailiff; his attempt to prevent Bathsheba from gaining early knowledge of Fanny Robin's child is foiled by the local predilection for tippling; his second salvation of Bathsheba's ricks is almost foiled by the same predilection, this time aggravated by Troy's corruption; Bathsheba's sheep would have been destroyed but for Oak's skill, the locals remaining ignorant of the finer techniques even of their own world. Everywhere it is the skill of Oak which must be called upon to defend Bathsheba's property, which often takes "the divinest form that money can wear -- that of necessary food for man and beast". What we see demonstrated is that rural values, indeed any values, can only be maintained through a continued and skilful adaptation to new circumstances.

The point is, of course, not that Oak represents the natural world -- he does not -- but that he understands it. Howard Babb sees nature as a sympathetic, even a moral force;² Gabriel Oak does not. Nature is a-moral, generous with her gifts but wasteful of them too. Just as one of Gabriel's earliest tasks is to save Bathsheba's ricks from destruction through man's negligence, so later he has to battle against nature to save them from nature's own profligate waste. Learning through his ill-fortune and personal negligence (his dead flock were not insured, his half-trained dog had been fed on raw mutton,³ etc) he becomes the guardian of Weatherbury

1. Ch. VI.

2. op.cit., p. 149.

3. Ch.V.

society precisely because of his understanding of nature as a force to be used or outwitted, but never to be trusted alone for the material salvation of man. To an understanding of nature must be added the skills of man; then, and only then, can there be some opportunity for existence independent of the environment.

The rural environment is thus stressed, but in relation to a society whose resources are of themselves inadequate, just as human nature itself is inadequate without the benefits of self-control and self-discipline. The barn, symbol of the chief vocation of rural folk, is man-made, an attempt to ward off the hazards threatened by nature, a refuge and a defence, and a testimony of a past competence in the rural world. But now the security of rural life is threatened not only by the shortcomings of the workfolk, but also the hazards faced by their mistress; and just as Gabriel guards the community, renewing its equilibrium and reinvigorating it, so he guards Bathsheba. Around him all the social and individual concerns are centred: he redresses the balance of the community by the preservation of the old skills (thatching the ricks) and the introduction of new (curing the sheep), and the personal equilibrium which he possesses and which allows him to do this is our touchstone for Hardy's treatment of the remaining major figures.

For the equilibrium in society is matched and partly maintained by a personal balance, also delicate, also in permanent need of renewal. Oak's is well-nigh destroyed by the loss of his flock, and is only regained by rigid self-control. So far from possessing only

"natural" virtues, Oak is governed by self-taught, acquired qualities which subordinate the natural man to the needs of others. He is clearly Hardy's hero, and the nature of his heroism has never been better stated than by T.S. Eliot. Since Eliot was condemning Hardy's work it is as well to record his view at some length:

It is only, indeed, in their emotional paroxysms that most of Hardy's characters come alive. This extreme emotionalism seems to me a symptom of decadence; it is a cardinal point of faith in a romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake, whatever the emotion or whatever its object. But it is by no means self-evident that human beings are most real when most violently **excited**; violent physical passions do not in themselves differentiate men from each other; but rather tend to reduce them to the same state; and the passion has significance only in relation to the character and behaviour of the man at other moments of his life and in other contexts. Furthermore, strong passion is only interesting in strong men; those who abandon themselves without resistance to excitements which tend to deprive them of reason, become merely instruments of feeling and lose their humanity; and unless there is moral resistance there is no meaning. 1.

These remarks, one suspects, are the direct consequence of the manner in which Hardy's works were once read, and there is a good deal of criticism sympathetic to Hardy which would appear to justify Eliot's hostile view. Yet, carefully read, Hardy can be seen to be putting forward a case which is identical to Eliot's. Certainly I know of no better exposition of the moral purpose of this book than this passage from After Strange Gods. Oak's whole meaning is in terms of moral resistance; Boldwood's

1. op.cit., p.55.

passionate love for Bathsheba "has significance only in relation to the character and behaviour of the man at other moments in his life and in other contexts", especially in the context of his relationship to Gabriel; he becomes an "instrument of feeling" -- "vane of passion" is the phrase which Hardy uses¹ -- and he abandons himself without resistance to an excitement which literally tends to deprive him of his reason. Of himself he has no significance in the work; set against Gabriel Oak he becomes supremely important as a warning which might have been couched exactly in Eliot's terms. Bathsheba, too, might easily have fallen in the same way, for her illusions about Sergeant Troy, though of shorter duration, are of the same nature as Boldwood's illusions about her.² She has more internal strength, perhaps; more important, she has Oak as a continual reminder of the nature of reality. There is in her, too, a capacity for learning from experience which Boldwood patently does not possess: he is forty, and not inexperienced -- "it was possible to form guesses concerning his wild capacities from old floodmarks faintly visible"³ -- yet he has learnt nothing. And it is for Boldwood that Hardy introduces the notion of personal equilibrium:

The phases of ~~his~~ Boldwood's life were ordinary enough, but his was not an ordinary nature. That stillness, which struck casual observers more than anything else in his character and habit, and seemed so precisely like the rest of inanition, may have been the perfect balance of enormous antagonistic forces -- positive and negative in fine adjustment. His equilibrium disturbed, he was in extremity at once. If an

1. Ch.XXXI.

2. Morrell, op.cit., p.60.

3. Ch.XVIII.

emotion possessed him at all, it ruled him; a feeling ~~not~~ mastering him was entirely latent. Stagnant or ~~rapid~~, he was never ~~slow~~. He was */slow*. always hit mortally, or he was missed. 1.

Hardy's unnecessary reiteration suggests how deeply he wished to stress this point. And it is interesting to note that all the major characters are introduced in similar terms, and we can see to what degree they have been able to achieve complete balance. "Oak's intellect and emotions were clearly separated", his moral colour is "a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture"; a man without extremes of temperament, the most even his friends and enemies can say about him is "rather a good man", or "rather a bad man".² Bathsheba has "elasticity in her firmness",³ which bodes well for her future in a Hardy world; but we are also told that she ~~is~~ is a "woman of good sense in reasoning on subjects where her heart was not involved", which bodes less well;⁴ and her whole course of action is explained by the statements, "Many of her thoughts were perfect syllogisms: unluckily they always remained thoughts. Only a few were irrational assumptions: but, unfortunately, they were the ones which most frequently grew into deeds."⁵ The clearest statements of all, however, are reserved for Troy:

His reason and his propensities had seldom any reciprocating influence, having separated by mutual consent long ago. . . . He had a quick comprehension and considerable force of character; but, being without the power to combine them, the comprehension became engaged with trivialities whilst waiting for the will to direct it, and the force wasted itself in useless grooves through unhedding the comprehension. 6.

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1. Ch.XVIII.
 2. Ch.I.
 3. Ch.XII.
 4. Ch.XVII. My italics.
 5. Ch.XX.
 6. Ch.XXV.

It seems perfectly accurate to say that Hardy does not take sides with his characters: but to say that he does not judge them is a different thing, and is refuted by the text. Judgement is made frequently, and in the same terms: to what extent is there control of the emotions by reason or by the will? To what extent is choice taken deliberately and with forethought? To what extent do characters comply with nature, to what extent do they resist, and on what degree of understanding is the decision to comply or resist based? Finally, to what extent are human skills and resources used for the benefit of man and the improvement of the conditions in which man lives? These are the questions posed in Far From the Madding Crowd, and they are asked of society as well as of individuals. The notion of equilibrium is common to both, and Hardy's detailed study of the rural environment is not thus an attempt merely to create a solid social background for his plot; 'solidity of specification' here does have that function, but it also stresses the communal effects of individual effort, and the part which even one individual may play in the reinvigoration of society. The "mere padding" which James saw is in fact one of the principal features which give proportion to the work, because it establishes the mutual relationship between the nature of man and the nature of the environment in which he lives and works. The moral lesson which Eliot drew from Hardy's heroes is the positive moral lesson of Hardy's book, for in the answers which Hardy gives to his questioning of man and society he shows us his idea of moral and effective conduct.

The progress of society and the conduct of the

individual depend largely on the nature of human choice, and choice is affected by all the questions we have named above. The rural community, like Bathsheba herself, is offered a choice between Gabriel Oak and Sergeant Troy. The nature of the two men is suggested in terms closely akin to the values of rural life: survival through continuity, predictability, and slow adaptation. When Oak first enters the farm he does so as a stranger, but a stranger whose origins are known and respected -- "That's never Gable Oak's grandson over at Norcombe -- never!"¹ In contrast, Troy's uncertain ancestry is not merely a melodramatic flourish: we are asked to set it beside the sturdy continuity which Oak represents. Similarly, we are asked to compare the reaction of the two men in despair. Oak's grief over his flock takes place in a setting where everything appears to invite death:

Oak raised his head, and wondering what he could do, listlessly surveyed the scene. By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon, which had only a few days to last -- the morning star dogging her on the left hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star into a phosphoric streak upon the water. All this Oak saw and remembered. 2.

-- wondering what he could do: every suggestion points towards suicide, but before long Oak earns the cost of an evening meal by playing "Jockey to the Fair" in the streets of Casterbridge.³ Troy in despair is similarly

1. Ch.VIII.

2. Ch.V.

3. See also Morrell, op.cit., p.12.

harassed by the environment: the gargoyle at Weatherbury church appears to mock his first, tentative efforts at reform. Like Oak, he is free to ignore the suggestions of the environment; unlike Oak, "he simply threw up his cards and foreswore his game for that time and always."¹ Troy's dexterity with the sword is contrasted with Oak's dexterity with the sheep-lance; and on the only occasion on which Gabriel becomes ~~wa~~ a warrior it is against the elements, his weapons a thatching-beetle and a lance used as a lightning-conductor.² Troy's facility of speech -- "to women he lied like a Cretan"³ -- is contrasted with Oak's cumbrous but dignified honesty; and so on. It is between these two men that the community must choose, and sometimes it makes the wrong choice. "'Tis as well to humour the man" is the measure of their weakness on this point. Oak leaves Troy to his tippling in the barn, the others remain, and the consequence is that a fortune's-worth of food is in danger. Even when Troy's danger to others is self-evident they cannot make a firm decision to warn Bathsheba of his presence.⁴ Postponement of decision is one danger. Foolish decision is another. Bathsheba's journey to Bath to break off her engagement to Troy is an act of self-deception and folly -- a woman does not fly to her lover to break with him.⁵ Boldwood's decision to believe in the reality of Troy's death is easily understood: his decision to treat Bathsheba's promises

1. Ch. XLVI. The notion that Hardy regards the gargoyle's works as evidence of a malign Providence is silly: the paragraph begins "he stood and meditated", and the notion is Troy's alone. Hardy's disapproval of Troy's response is clear from the terms chosen for the narrative. These are wholly negative, showing what Troy did not do, but could have done.

2. Ch. XXXVI-XXXVII.

3. Ch. XXV.

4. Ch. LIII.

5. Ch. XXXVII.

as fixed and real is not. Bathsheba avoids a decision about the valentine by the equal folly of entrusting decision to the fall of a hymn-book, "idly and unreflectingly" as Hardy says.¹ Decision is not compelled by the environment, as we have seen in the comparisons between Oak and Troy; nor is it compelled by the views or strength of others, as we see in Oak's first refusal to treat Bathsheba's rank-blown sheep,² or his later refusal to leave Bathsheba's employment.³ It rests only on honesty and straight dealing: in some works the position is more complicated, but in Far From the Madding Crowd it is completely clear.

We have noticed that Hardy, seeing nature as an organism which includes man, **society**, and animate and inanimate states of existence, sees also a series of parallels or correspondences. The parallel between equilibrium in the community and in the individual is only one aspect of this organic unity, and his treatment of the environment must be seen in the same framework. Certain features of landscape, for example, may parallel certain features of character, but they are not thereby symbolic of character. At their most elementary, they do no more than illustrate the recurring irony of Hardy's world: the irony that man, though evolved with and through the rest of nature, has nonetheless a consciousness which isolates and distinguishes him. If we read Hardy's system of nature as a modern re-writing of the Great Chain of Being of earlier times, we can see the special position which he assigns to man as in some ways similar to **Pope's** "middle state" -- except that Hardy's man has "too much

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1. Ch. XIII.
 2. Ch. XXI.
 3. Ch. XXIX.

knowledge" for anything but "the sceptic side", and to become a

Chaos of thought and passion, all confused is, in Hardy's world, to invite disaster. The comparison is not a fanciful one: just as earlier ages saw the hand of Providence in everything, so Hardy read in everything the absence of Providence, a complete lack of design. Had he also been able to see a lack of law he might even have been able to derive a crumb of comfort from the fact: instead he saw a pattern which left only limited scope for freedom of action among men. Yet limited scope is not absence of scope, and the parallels between man and nature can, if carelessly read, cause confusion. For, apart from man's possession of consciousness, Hardy saw the whole created universe in the same terms, subject and suffering under immutable law. This was to influence his language, in prose and poetry, to a very marked degree, and it enabled him to transfer the language of one environment or state to another. This is most notably true when the subjects of decay or death arise, as they do often since Hardy sees decay and death as inherent in the frame of things. In The Woodlanders trees have "jackets of lichen and stockings of moss",¹ and rotten tree-stumps protrude from the ground "like black teeth from green gums".² The planets in Tess are like apples on a tree, "most of them splendid and sound -- a few blighted".³ In the same novel the evening sun "became ugly to Tess like a great inflamed wound in the

1. Woodlanders, Ch.XLII.

2. Ibid.

3. Tess, Ch.IV.

sky";¹ in A Pair of Blue Eyes it is "a red face looking on with a drunken leer".² In Jude the decaying colleges of Christminster assume reptilian personalities:

Cruelties, insults, had, he perceived, been inflicted on the aged erections... Several moved him as he would have been moved by maimed sentient beings. They were wounded, broken, sloughing off their outer shapes in the deadly struggle against years, weather, and man. 3.

One can amass a large number of similar examples from the novels, and many more from the poems. Hardy is conscious of the innumerable parallels between one level of existence and another, and in practice he draws up a new chain of being whose correspondences are as elaborate as those of its earlier counterpart. In Far From the Madding Crowd these correspondences first emerge as a general and systematic pattern, but they had already made their appearance in earlier novels, including the first, Desperate Remedies. Such correspondences perform several functions, but often, as in a passage noted earlier from A Pair of Blue Eyes,⁴ their purpose is not merely to stress the parallels between man and nature, but also to stress man's isolation in nature and the responsibility which the possession of consciousness brings with it. Often, in fact, such passages judge the determination with which a given character faces that responsibility.

We should first take the earliest major example in Hardy's work, Manston's wooing of Cytherea:

They were standing by the ruinous foundations of an old mill in the midst of a meadow. Between

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1. Tess, Ch. XXI.
2. Blue Eyes, Ch. XXII.
3. Jude, Ch. II-ii.
4. See above, pp. 145-8.

grey and half-overgrown stonework -- the only signs of masonry remaining -- the water gurgled down from the old mill-pond to a lower level, under the cloak of rank broad leaves -- the sensuous natures of the vegetable world. On the right hand the sun, resting on the horizon line, streamed across the ground from below copper-coloured and lilac clouds, stretched out in flats beneath a sky of pale soft green. All dark objects on the earth that lay towards the sun were over-spread by a purple haze, against which a swarm of wailing gnats shone forth luminously, rising upward and floating away like sparks of fire.

The stillness oppressed and reduced her to mere passivity. The only wish the humidity of the place leftⁱⁿ her was to stand motionless. The helpless flatness of the landscape gave her, as it gives all such temperaments, a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single entity under the sky. . . .

. . . Thinking and hesitating, she looked as far as the autumnal haze on the marshy ground would allow her to see distinctly. There was the fragment of a hedge -- all that remained of a 'wet old garden' -- standing in the middle of the mead, without a definite beginning or ending, purposeless and valueless. It was overgrown, and choked with mandrakes, and she could almost fancy she heard their shrieks. . . . Should she withdraw her hand? No, she could not withdraw it now; it was too late, the act would not imply refusal. She felt as one in a boat without oars, drifting with closed eyes down a river -- she knew not whither.

1.

This is an extraordinary passage, and a very illuminating one. It would be easy to read it merely as an illustration of the effect of landscape upon temperament, but that is not what it sets out to be. Earlier Manston had gazed into a water-butt at "hundreds of thousands of minute living creatures" sporting and tumbling in the water, and

1. op.cit., Ch.XII-vi.

he had reflected, "Why shouldn't I be happy through my little day too?" It is easy to see that it is Manston's temperament which is illuminated here, not the effect of the environment on it. Similarly, in the passage above, landscape is used to indicate the temperament of Cytherea, and again, Manston. The leaves which are "the sensuous natures of the vegetable world" are clearly parallel to Manston himself; the stillness and helpless passivity of the landscape parallel Cytherea's own passivity. Even the mandrakes, which might be read as a proleptic image, are no more than a comment on the potential inherent, not in the situation, but in Manston's character.¹ It seems that what has sometimes been seen as proleptic imagery, indicating a predetermined sequence of events, may rather be read in terms of character-judgement, or assessments of frames of mind. It may be that an existing mood is strengthened by its parallel in nature, but there is no evidence that Hardy assumes that man should follow the parallel, and more evidence that he believes he should not. The contrast noted above between Oak and Troy would suggest this, and we shall note further instances in which the subordination of human wills to moods of nature leads only to unhappiness, and sometimes to disaster. That man may be misled -- not by nature, which is indifferent, but by his own trust in nature -- is suggested powerfully in Tess, but there are already illustrations of this in Far From the Madding

1. The passage may deliberately create an ironic ambiguity: mandrakes are said to be nourished beneath the gallows but are also powerful as love-potions (Firor, pp. 113-4). The image, like the book, is not wholly successful, but it is a bold attempt to fuse two potential situations in one image.

Crowd. After Bathsheba has discovered the existence of Fanny Robin's child she spends a night in the open, sheltered by a brake of fern:

From her feet, and between the beautiful yellowing ferns with their feathery arms, the ground sloped downwards to a hollow, in which was a species of swamp, dotted with fungi. A morning mist hung over it now -- a fulsome yet magnificent silvery veil, full of light from the sun, yet semi-opaque -- the hedge behind it being in some measure hidden by its hazy luminousness. Up the sides of the depression grew sheaves of the common rush, and here and there a peculiar species of flag, the blades of which glistened in the emerging sun, like scythes. But the general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth, and in the waters under the earth. The fungi grew in all manner of positions from rotting leaves and tree stumps, some exhibiting to her listless gaze their ~~clammy~~ tops, others ~~red~~ ^{red} as arterial blood, others were saffron yellow, and others tall and attenuated, with stems like macaroni. Some were leathery and of richest browns. The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences, small and great, in the immediate neighbourhood of comfort and health, and Bathsheba arose with a tremor at the thought of having passed a night on the brink of so dismal a place. 1.

of their oozing gills.

Some were marked with great splotches,

The swamp may be the symbol of the despair into which Bathsheba had so nearly fallen: nonetheless, the symbolism goes deeper than that. It occurs to Bathsheba "that she had seen [the place] on some previous occasion, and that what appeared like an impassable thicket was in reality a brake of fern now withering fast." And of course the swamp is that same "hollow amid the ferns" in which only months before she had been lulled by the beauty around her until she was prepared to be captivated by Troy's

demonstration of sword-play.¹ Then the ferns had been "soft feathery arms caressing her up to her shoulders", the swamp at her feet "a belt of verdure . . . floored with a thick flossy carpet of moss and grass intermingled, so yielding that the foot was half-buried within it". The difference between the hollow's two states is not merely a difference between two states of mind: it represents the likely, almost inevitable, outcome of a union between two characters so different morally as Troy and Bathsheba, a union which Bathsheba entered voluntarily and of whose implications she has at last become aware. The "artificial red" of Troy's cloak finds its counterpart in "great splotches, red as arterial blood"; the sword which had reproduced the actions of "sowing, hedging, reaping, and threshing" appears again in "a peculiar species of flag, the blades of which glistened in the emerging sun like scythes"; the beams of light which had "well-nigh shut out earth and heaven" now form a "fulsome yet magnificent silvery veil", shutting out the hedge. On that earlier occasion Bathsheba had cried, "Why, it is magic!"; and now, in her flight from Troy, she and nature are fused as the leaves rush away in the breeze "like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing". But perhaps all that one needs to point to to illustrate the relationship between the two scenes are the ferns, "plump and diapophonous from rapid growth" at first, and now "withering fast".

What Hardy has done successfully here, and what he was to do again, is to find a satisfactory correlative in nature for the phases of the human mind and emotions. Interior monologue or straightforward description of a man's

1. Ch. XXVIII.

inner thoughts and feelings are abandoned for a method more appropriate to Hardy's views about the general pattern of nature. Here the contrast between the magnetism of flamboyant sexuality and the waste caused by a response to sexuality divorced from reality, is complete.

The method gains in subtlety and maturity as Hardy's work matures, but we already find the full correlation between nature and humanity: so complete, indeed, that while one can point to the existence of such passages and describe their components, one merely emphasises rather than adds to one's knowledge of the situation.

Such passages are not concerned with any predetermined sequence of incidents, as Holloway suggests,¹ and while they point to a system of parallels in nature they do not indicate a straitjacket of conduct and choice which is inescapable. For example, Bathsheba, before entering the hollow for the first time, actually decides to go home again, and then weakens.² They do indicate judgements of character or illuminate states of mind. Moreover, to see them in these terms is to avoid the difficulty indicated by Morrell,³ who noted that some "proleptic" images are not in the event fulfilled and therefore cannot be said to foretell a sequence of events. In Far From the Madding Crowd there is no prolepsis, nor could there be: Hardy's stress is on the nature of choice and on man's responsibility for events.

The use of landscape, then, serves two purposes in these passages. Firstly, Hardy's treatment underlines the organic unity of man and his social and natural environment,

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1. The Victorian Sage, London, 1962, pp. 268-9.

2. Ch. XXVIII.

3. op.cit., Ch. I.

so that we begin to perceive certain systematic tendencies in nature of which man is only a minor part; and secondly, man is distinguished from this system by his possession of consciousness: his states of mind may have their parallels in nature, but he is by no means obliged to be led or misled by nature, and when he deliberately misleads himself he is to be condemned. R.C.Carpenter, commenting on the moment in Desperate Remedies when Manston looks at the insects in the water-butt, writes:

This is not the stuff of most action stories but rather one of those moments when we look into the depths, not of a still pool only, but also of reality. Here also is the parallelism or reflection between human affairs and those of the animal world, made ironic and faintly gruesome by the implied comparison of man's life with mindless and miniscule water-snakes. 1.

This misses the point,² drawing, in fact, precisely the same conclusion as Manston, though Carpenter's use of the word "ironic" suggests that he feels something to be wrong here. There is in fact no parallel between man and nature here and Manston, in choosing to draw one, damns himself. Like Troy with the gargoyle, Manston uses the water-butt subjectively as a justification for actions which he knows to be indefensible; like Elfride, who also gazed into a pool,³ Manston allies himself with lower forms of life, and in doing so abdicates from the human responsibility with which he has been endowed. The fact that Hardy uses the environment as evidence of an organic system and as a means of characterisation does demand care from the reader, but the technique is consistent

1. "Hardy's 'Gargoyles'", Modern Fiction Studies, 6,3, 1960, p.225.

2. In fairness one should add that Carpenter's article misses the point very rarely.

3. See above, pp. 137-9.

and coherent, and rarely do we have an excuse for reading it wrongly. Nor, when we understand what Hardy is doing, need we accept Eliot's view that Hardy uses landscape because it is highly-suited to an author "interested not at all in men's minds, but only in their emotions; and perhaps only in men as vehicles for emotions".¹ Landscape is used, more often than not, to indicate the tragic failure of mind, the dominance of emotion over reason, at crucial points in the human career. If it is true that the description of Norcombe Hill in Chapter II of Far From the Madding Crowd is intended as a keynote to Gabriel's character -- and I think it is² -- then we have a scene where the principal stress is laid on human resistance, sensitivity, perceptiveness, but not at all on emotion. Similarly, the unnatural features of the landscape in Chapter XV reflect Boldwood's rejection of reason in favour of romance in terms which make it obvious that such a course leads only to unbalance and possible disaster.

Far From the Madding Crowd is the first of Hardy's works to make a claim to greatness. The basis for its claim is its treatment of an abiding moral problem, man's relation to his surroundings and to others; and the claim may be respected, and finally conceded, on the grounds that an old philosophy of the necessity of the dominance of reason over passion is not merely re-stated, but is renewed in terms of a modern vision of nature in which the role of man is reduced, but his significance enhanced.

1. op.cit., p. 55.

2. Howard Babb, op.cit., overstresses the relationship between the natural backcloth and characterisation -- his comments on Troy, for example, are unconvincing -- but in general terms his article is soundly based.

Ethelberta and The Return of the Native.

"The real cause of its failure was that Hardy was not by nature a social satirist", writes Evelyn Hardy of The Hand of Ethelberta, citing Rutland with approval.¹ Without wishing to defend the book against the charge of failure, one can only say that this judgement is wrong: The Hand of Ethelberta is not primarily a social satire. It reflects Hardy's further attempt to analyse problems already raised in Far From the Madding Crowd, and as an attempt, albeit an unsuccessful one, at a more subtle analysis of the nature of human reason and the emotions it deserves an important place in any study of Hardy's work. Had Hardy shown more awareness of his own developing attitude to the problems he was facing it might even have played a vital part in our understanding of him, and been a turning-point in his achievement; whereas we are compelled by its failure to see it only as a faltering step towards ideas which he carried out more successfully elsewhere.

It would appear to be the first of the novels to have a direct source in the past history of Hardy's family. This is not to suggest that the course of Ethelberta's career is based on, or even resembles, incidents in the life of any of Hardy's relatives: simply that the story was suggested to him by information received from his mother. We have seen above² that before her marriage Jemima Hardy had worked as a cook,

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1. Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy, p. 154. Rutland, p. 176.
 2. See above, pp. 17-18.

and that the fact that she had been in London and intended to return there rather in the manner of the butler Chickerel abandoning his family was suppressed from Hardy's biography. One cannot fix precise dates for her stay in London, though her service with the Hon. Charles Fox-Strangways must have ended at the latest in 1836, since in that year he died.¹

She may have returned to Dorset then, or she may have remained in service at Holland House.² In any event, it would be extremely difficult to learn much about the nature of the household, and still more difficult to trace Jemima's fortunes there, since the Ilchester family appear ~~not~~ to have christened their servants with names which bore no resemblance to those given them at the font. A portrait of "Lord and Lady Holland in the Library of Holland House", painted in 1838, for example, includes two servants, "Edgar" and "Harold", i.e. "William Doggett and his brother Thomas (or perhaps Samuel Walker, a trusted servant in later years)".³

Yet if such sublime indifference makes it hard to discover the nature of a servant's life under the Ilchesters, one can at least guess intelligently how Hardy's material came to him. At the end of Chapter VII of Ethelberta the butler writes to his daughter:

One of them/said/you must be fifty to have
got such an experience. Her guess was a very
shrewd one in the bottom of it,...for it was
grounded upon the way you use those strange
experiences of mine in/society that I tell you
of, and dress them up as if they were yours. . .

/ actually / that
/ the

If Hardy heard tales from his mother, he could also benefit from his own observation of London life, and from the critical frame of mind which made his first

1. Hutchins, History of Dorset, II, 662-3.

2. Hardy's poem "A Curch Romance" suggests "c. 1835" as the date of his parents' meeting, but he clearly did not know precisely.

3. See Lord Ilchester's Chronicles of Holland House, London, 1937 facing p. 246.

attempt at a novel, The Poor Man and the Lady, an apparently dangerous social, or even socialist, document. What needs to be stressed, however, is that neither the incidents nor the social comment, however they were derived, are of vital importance in themselves. Indeed, the social comment no more constitutes the novel than the rustic commentaries constitute the novels set more consistently in Wessex. Hardy's novels are almost always about characters rather than groups, and this is true of Ethelberta as it is elsewhere.

Nonetheless, Ethelberta is a problem novel. Its theme would appear to be clear enough: the problem lies in the attitudes which underlie it. Like Far From the Madding Crowd, The Hand of Ethelberta is concerned with the respective roles of reason and emotion. Its "comic" element consists simply of a satire on the use of reason for paltry and inadequate ends. Leslie Stephen was so anxious that the point should be put across that he suppressed the sub-title, "A Comedy in Chapters", from the serial edition of the novel, explaining to Hardy:

I find . . . from other people that it gives an unfortunate idea. They understand by Comedy something of the farce description, and expect you to be funny in the fashion of Mr. --, or some professional joker. This, of course, is stupid . . . 1.

There is no difficulty, faced with the complete text, in accepting the sub-title, and perhaps it is enough to read Ethelberta simply as if, in stressing that reason is too

1. Life, p. 104.

valuable to be frivolously used, it made the same point as Far From the Madding Crowd. Yet this I cannot do. Hardy's humour is never of the rollicking kind: when it is purely rustic it usually involves some kind of comment on the central action: when it is satiric it usually possesses a sour, even a bitter edge. And it appears to me that one must approach Ethelberta in the frame of mind one adopts when approaching the "Satires of Circumstance"; ~~in~~ other words, we must not expect a detached, dispassionate satire. Whether this is so or not, Hardy's failure in this work is more closely related to a growing dissatisfaction with the attitudes of Far From the Madding Crowd, to a consciousness that the problems treated there are more complex than he had allowed for, and, one suspects, to a confusion in the face of new problems.

There are still, it is true, instances when his attitudes are quite unambiguous, when he sees the powerful influence of the passions as dangerous to human stability and self-determination. Christopher Julian says at one point¹ "I have a feeling of being moved about like a puppet in the hands of a person who legally can be nothing to me", and his sister soliloquises:

Ethelberta, having already become an influence in Christopher's system, might soon become more -- an indestructible fascination -- to drag him about, turn his soul inside out, harrow him, twist him, and otherwise torment him, according to the stereotyped form of such processes. 2.

 1. Ch. IV.
 2. Ch. V.

Against the impressionable Christopher, Ethelberta ought to be a heroine of self-controlled restraint. When her emotions come into play, as they do frequently, they are repressed. Yet the achievement won by her restraint is a highly dubious one, and this not merely because her aims are dubious. She does not even succeed in her ~~initial~~ initial plan "not meanly to ensnare a husband just to provide incomes for herself and her family, but to find some man she might respect, who would maintain her in such a stage of comfort as should . . . enable her to further organize her talent, and provide incomes for them herself". Her ultimate marriage to Mountclere, in the light of such an aim, is laughable, and Hardy's ironic twist of plot whereby Ethelberta herself is entrapped by a lascivious old man exposes Ethelberta, and not the society in which she moves, to ridicule.

There is no reason to believe that this may not have been Hardy's intention, though it does ~~raise~~ raise problems about his motives in writing the book. Before dealing with these, however, we must face the basic reason for his failure, which can best be approached by way of analogy with Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Evelyn Hardy noted that the moral issues of the books were similar,¹ and it is possible to go even further, and to point to similarities between the characters of each novel. The butler, Chickerel, is not more than a more sophisticated John Durbeyfield, relying on his

1. op.cit., pp. 150-1.

daughter to maintain the family fortunes, while Ethelberta herself is a Tess who is ready to prostitute herself to offset her father's inadequacy, and in a sense her character complements that of Tess. Without Tess's "purity" (whose implications we may examine only later) she yet possesses a forthright honesty which Tess fails to show. Ethelberta's secret is disclosed to Mountclere with little hesitation: and Mountclere's honesty in seeing that her birth is irrelevant to her virtues is enough to eclipse Angel ■ Clare's priggish chastity. Hardy himself pinpoints the problem at the end of Chapter XXXVI: "Was the moral incline upward or down?" and Evelyn Hardy summarises it nicely in the words "Is it good and right that a woman should benefit others, by whom she is bound by ties of blood and affection, by sacrificing her chastity and her heart".¹ As Evelyn Hardy notes, neither Ethelberta nor Hardy can solve the problem, but it is one to which he will return.

Possibly Hardy could not solve it because he could not state it in a convincing form. His failure here is fundamental. Any inadequacy in drawing polite society -- and Hardy's incompetence in this field has always seemed to ~~me~~ ^{me} over-rated -- is irrelevant beside such an integral flaw. Whether he had properly defined the book's moral terms for himself seems doubtful: in any case, he could not present them, simply because he could not provide a suitably convincing plot. The moral problem arises only if Ethelberta has a real responsibility towards her family: in Tess the shiftless

1. op.cit., p.. 150-1.

father, his ill-health, and death, are crucial to the family; in Ethelberta the father is possessed of a good job, a home to live in while he pursues it, and, one would infer, sufficient means to support his family. Nor is that family wholly dependent on the father's earnings: Picotee is a school-teacher, two brothers are at work. So far from being destitute, the family would appear to be moderately comfortable. Ethelberta herself is content to leave them in obscurity, rather than offend the ~~elder~~ Lady Petherwin by leaving her society: and her decision to do so cannot be defended on the grounds that it is for her family's good, since her ultimate ambition is to raise them out of the social (or at least the financial) class to which they belong. Hardy remarks at the opening of the first chapter that "a bear may be taught to dance", and Ethelberta's aim seems merely to be to achieve some such greater degree of sophistication for her relatives. This is not an unpraiseworthy aim: but neither does it present a moral issue. The ultimate responsibility does not lie on Ethelberta, but on her father.¹

Despite this flaw, the book remains interesting as a step in Hardy's career. Clarice Short saw it as important chiefly as a contrast to Hardy's view of tragedy:

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1. That Hardy doubted the sense even of raising a family from one social class to another seems likely, since he satirises not only the upper classes but the aspirations of the lower, as well as the inverted snobbery of the lower classes. The failure of the satire, however, seems to me to arise from the failure to ■ establish a clear relationship between the satire and the book's theme. None of the terms of the novel are sufficiently clearly defined for us to judge Hardy's gifts as a satirist.

If in Hardy's view comedy is the triumph of reason over emotion, the victory of the individual will, rather than the victory of time, chance, passion, and social convention, Ethelberta is a consistently portrayed heroine of comedy. 1.

But this is not enough: we have seen that Far From the Madding Crowd was as much concerned as Ethelberta with the triumph of reason over passion. What distinguishes Ethelberta is the light in which that triumph is portrayed. Ethelberta as a heroine possesses honesty, passion, and sensitivity. In the course of her career she strips herself of all these, except perhaps her honesty, and in doing so she becomes alienated from herself until she becomes identifiable by little more than her function as the seeker of a rich husband and the maintainer, or rather social improver, of a large number of dependants. It is in this slight sketch of self-alienation that the importance of Ethelberta lies, for it suggests that, of feeling and reason, it is feeling which is the richer for the pursuit of life.

This is a judgement which cannot be defended on the basis of this book alone, and which appears to be doubtful if one takes into account Hardy's previous work. Yet a change, of which Hardy himself appears to have been unaware at first, is making itself felt, and will exercise its domination still more in The Return of the Native. The nature of this change was noticed acutely by D.H. Lawrence, in his Study of Thomas Hardy,² and so far as I know has been noticed nowhere else:

The Hand of Ethelberta is the one almost cynical comedy. It marks the zenith of a certain feeling in the Wessex novels,...the feeling that the best thing to do is to kick out the craving for "Love" and substitute common sense, leaving sentiment to minor characters.

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1. "In Defence of Ethelberta", Nineteenth-Century Fiction, June 1958.
 2. Phoenix, London 1936 & 1961; also D.H. Lawrence: Selected Literary Criticism, ed. A Beal, London, 1961.

This novel is a shrug of the shoulders, and a last taunt to hope, it is the end of the happy endings, except where sanity and a little cynicism again appear in The Trumpet-Major, to bless where they despise. It is the hard, resistant, ironical announcement of personal failure, resistant and half-grinning. It gives way to violent, angry passions and real tragedy, real killing of beloved people, self-killing. Till now, only Elfride among the beloved, has been killed; the good men have always come out on top.

It is always difficult to go all the way with Lawrence, and it is so here: but as so often in his comments on Hardy he has seized the central point, and these few remarks, almost all that he wrote on Ethelberta, are probably the most fruitful words ever written about that novel. Because there is a feeling of personal failure, quite apart from the book's artistic failure; and it seems to stem from an awareness that the balance expressed so neatly in Gabriel Oak may not always be adequate to prevent human desecration. The real beginning of an exploration of the balance between reason and the emotions had not yet begun, but it is significant that in The Hand of Ethelberta Hardy satirises what he has formerly praised. It is also significant that the one exception among the later books which Lawrence notes is The Trumpet-Major: for this book marks the end of a period in which Hardy appears to have had no clear idea of what was happening to him, no clear understanding of his slowly changing attitude. The Hand of Ethelberta marks the beginning of this process of change, The Trumpet-Major its final stages: while in The Return of the Native and its revisions over a long period of years, Hardy became aware of, and began to express fully, the dilemma which faced him.

That Hardy was not at first conscious of what he

was doing in The Return of the Native -- that, in fact, he intended a "re-write" of Far From the Madding Crowd -- has been fully established by John Paterson in The Making of The Return of the Native (California, 1960).¹ Eustacia Vye's position in the book, for example, was to have been quite different from that which she finally assumed -- she was, indeed, to have been far more a "Mephistophelian visitant" than Diggory Venn, and local opinions that she was a witch were to have been given a stronger foundation than mere suspicion.² In fact, as Eustacia's character began to assert itself, Hardy began a drastic re-appraisal of his task; so that we are now faced with a novel which defines, more clearly than Ethelberta, a problem which Hardy could not solve. The book is not a total success: that its impact is nonetheless impressive is due entirely to Hardy's handling of problematic material.

The failure, as in Ethelberta, is caused by a mishandling of the plot, and as such is a failure to convince. This faulty approach is in itself a mark of Hardy's uncertainty of his aim, since there is some doubt in the novel as to where the principal stress should lie. Paterson points out³ that the strength of the leading role is diffused by the struggle for dominance between Eustacia, Clym, and Mrs Yeobright, and rather surprisingly he also sees Thomasin as a

1. ". . . The Return of the Native had its inception in a novel not different in subject and treatment from Far From the Madding Crowd. . ." op.cit., p. 164.

2. op.cit., especially Ch. 2.

3. op.cit., p. 166.

contender for the heroine's place. This may well have been true in Hardy's early conception of the novel, but ~~there is~~ Thomasin is hardly a contender in its final form. However, there is a further, and more important, fragmenting of emphasis. Hardy's plot would seem to stress that the catastrophe is caused by consequences of personal failure among the principal characters. Eustacia, for example, could have totally averted the catastrophe by waking Clym after his mother's call, or, when he awoke, by telling him of it; or, alternatively, she could herself have made an active search of the heath immediately after her failure to open the door (Hardy says that Mrs Yeobright did not follow the path, but she could hardly have gone far). That Eustacia was unable to do these things is directly attributable to her own consciousness of a guilty past with Wildeve; but this, too, is a consequence of her own actions and inadequacies. That the catastrophe need never have occurred does not appear to me to be a criticism of Hardy's art: rather it would appear that Hardy himself would have taken the same view, making the point, as he made it in Far From the Madding Crowd, that we may bind our future by our present actions, and that consequence is the most powerful force in depriving us of our freedom. Nor, as Morrell shows,¹ are Eustacia and Damon Wildeve essentially different from Hardy's other wayward heroes and heroines:

These romantic natures in The Return of the Native are almost incapable of choice, because they choose resolutely and wholeheartedly only what they think they have lost. Eustacia's
 x love for Wildeve varies inversely with his

1. op.cit., p. 145.

accessibility, and the degree of commitment to him. When she thinks she has won him, her affections at once cool . . .

They are no different from Elfride, sighing for the unattainable, and in placing their propensities before their reason they resemble Troy or the early Bathsheba.

As in the earlier novels, too, Hardy is concerned to show the nature of an environment's effect upon character, and in a striking example he illustrates once more ^{that} the influence of the environment does not alter men's responsibility for decision, but does throw light on their state of mind. Indeed, in The Return of the Native he repeats, almost word for word, a passage from Desperate Remedies to imply that Clym Yeobright, after his proposal of marriage and its acceptance by Eustacia, is conscious of having taken an unwise step. In Desperate Remedies,¹ as we have seen above, Cytherea Graye's indecisiveness before making a choice which she distrusted had the effect of making her particularly sensitive to the surroundings, whose "helpless flatness" oppressed her. This is immediately followed by Manston's further approach which, had he pressed it, would almost certainly have brought about Cytherea's consent. In The Return of the Native we find Clym and Eustacia alone on the heath:

They stood still and prepared to bid each other farewell. Everything before them was on a perfect level. The sun, resting on the horizon line, streamed across the ground from ~~between~~ copper-coloured and lilac clouds, stretched out in flats beneath a sky of pale soft green. All

1. See above, pp. 166-7.

dark objects on the earth that lay towards the sun were overspread by a purple haze, against which groups of wailing gnats shone out, rising upwards and dancing about like sparks of fire. 1.

This is immediately followed by Eustacia's whisper, "O! this leaving you is too hard to bear!", and the decision to marry. Less than fifty lines later we find:

As he watched, the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade. There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun.

As if to stress how conscious Clym has become of the rash nature of his action, Hardy adds: "Now that he had reached a cooler moment he would have preferred a less hasty marriage; but the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game". And there is almost a note of incredulousness, even in the author's voice, as he concludes the chapter; "Whether Eustacia was to add one other to the list of those who love too hotly to love long and well, the forthcoming event was certainly a ready way of proving".

What happens, both to Clym and Cytherea, is that they experience a failure of nerve, not at the force exerted by the environment but by the utter refusal of the environment to take responsibility for their actions. Cytherea eventually accepts Manston, as Clym adheres to his proposal to Eustacia, under the pressure of

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1. III, 5. Compare this and the subsequent passage with Desperate Remedies, Ch. XII, 6.

their knowledge that they are alone with their decision, and because they realise the enormity of the decision they must take. This is implicit in Desperate Remedies and in the first part of The Return of the Native, but before Hardy has finished with Clym he reminds us of Clym's failure of nerve, and attributes it directly to his sense of the "vast impassivity" around him:

A consciousness of a vast impassivity in all which lay around him took possession even of Yeobright in his wild walk towards Alderworth. He had once before felt in his own person this overpowering of the fervid by the inanimate; but then it had tended to enervate a passion far sweeter than that which at present pervaded him. It was once when he stood parting from Eustacia in the moist still levels beyond the hills. 1.

This has a point which Hardy has made before, and will make again: against the impassivity of nature, and situated in an unconscious universe, the only responsibility which can possibly exist is man's. The destructive figures of his work are characters who make decisions rashly and hold to them, even when there is time to withdraw, in the illusion that life is a game and that a card once played cannot be withdrawn; characters who are blinded by romance, until they are deprived of choice, or characters who deliberately postpone choice, form the agents of Hardy's plots. Clym postpones visiting his mother until it is too late; in precisely the same way he says of his wife, "I will wait for a day or two longer -- not longer than two days certainly; and if she does not send to me in that time I will send to her".² When he eventually does send

1. Ch. V, 3.

2. Ch. V, 6.

for her there might still, just, be time; but Eustacia's grandfather postpones delivery of the letter just as Clym has postponed writing it. Hardy does not strain credibility here: he always provides reasons for vacillation; but beneath all the vacillations the reasons for action are stronger. There are also characters who refuse to blame themselves, and who incur the author's disapproval by doing so:

Having resolved on flight Eustacia at times seemed anxious that something should happen to thwart her own intention. . . 1.

She had certainly believed that Clym was awake, and the excuse would be an honest one as far as it went; but nothing could save her from censure in refusing to answer at the first knock. Yet, 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. 2.

In all of these instances -- and they are duplicated again and again -- Hardy is concerned with individual reactions to a specific situation; and he makes it clear that the responsibility for those reactions always rests upon the figures themselves. In this respect he is wholly consistent with a definition of tragedy which he drew up shortly after the completion of the serial version of the novel:

A Plot, or Tragedy, should arise from the gradual closing in of a situation that comes of ordinary human passions, prejudices, and ambitions, by reason of the characters taking no trouble to ward off the disastrous events produced by the said passions, prejudices, and ambitions. 3.

It is just because of his consistency in observing

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1. Ch. V, 7.
 2. Ch. IV, 8.
 3. Life, p. 120.

this definition that the greater inconsistency of the book becomes apparent. Had the work been a drama of human incompetence, and nothing more, Hardy's point would have been made, and allusions to the influence of "Fate" over the characters would have had the same kind of relevance as they have for Far From the Madding Crowd -- in other words, "Fate" interpreted in terms comparable to Eustacia's "Prince of the World" is an invention intended as a self-excuse by romantic characters. But in laying so much stress on the Promethean myth, and in attempting to write a novel in some ways parallel with Greek tragedy,¹ Hardy was appealing to a grander notion than that of mere human incompetence, setting his figures against a cosmic background which would ennoble them despite their weaknesses. That this does, to some extent, happen is due to factors other than plot or setting: and the only two characters to whom it even begins to happen are Clym and Eustacia. The remaining figures are in no sense in rebellion against a cosmic order, or even protesting against a cosmic disorder: they are the victims of human inadequacies and personal resentments.

This ought to condemn the book as a total failure: yet one is immediately conscious that, for the sympathetic reader, The Return of the Native is impressive. Often the stature of the book is explained vaguely in terms of "Egdon Heath", or the more thoughtful approach which Paterson adopted:

By a virtually systematic ~~accumulation~~ accumulation of classical allusions, [Hardy] evoked the atmosphere or background of Greek tragedy

1. The evidence for this is embodied in Paterson's study.

and, by so doing, framed and transfigured, as he had not done in Far From the Madding Crowd and as he would not do in The Woodlanders, his purely pastoral narrative. ~~But~~ By a perceptible cumulative movement that began with the decision to incorporate certain formal features of classical drama, that continued with the proliferation of such classical allusions as those to Parian marble, Sappho, and Oedipus, and that ~~culminated~~ ^{culminated} in Eustacia's designation . . . as the lineal descendant of Homeric kings, Hardy created the illusion of a world larger than Wessex, a world capable of epic-tragic dimensions. He evoked, furthermore, by a proliferation of the imagery of fire, the major theme of the Prometheus legend and thereby gave the substance of the novel a still more specific and significant frame. 1.

I would not wish to dispute the powerful cumulative effect of such allusions and images, least of all the effectiveness of the Promethean metaphor. This is invoked very early in the work:

. . . to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout 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. 2.

It subsequently returns in a highly intelligent series of cross-references, most strikingly in the passages describing Mrs Yeobright's exhaustion on the heath, and Clym Yeobright's face. The first is made the more striking by being associated with a "vision" of the normal routines of the earthly life and the life of man's aspirations; and each returns to the notion~~of~~ of man as a chained divinity:

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1. op.cit., p. 167.
2. Ch. I,3.

In two hours she reached a slope about three-fourths the whole distance from Alderworth to her own home, where a little patch of shepherd's-thyme intruded upon the path; and she sat down upon the perfumed mat it formed there. In front of her a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare across the way, where they toiled a never-ending and heavy-laden throng. To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower. She remembered that this bustle of ants had been in progress for years at the same spot -- doubtless those of the old times were the ancestors of these which walked there now. She leant back to obtain more thorough rest, and the soft eastern portion of the sky was as great a relief to her eyes as the thyme was to her head. While she looked a heron arose on that side of the sky and flew ^{on} with his face towards the sun. He had come dripping wet from some pool in the valleys, and as he flew the edges and lining of his wings, his thighs, and his breast were so caught by the bright sunbeams that he appeared as if formed of burnished silver. 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 she wished that she could arise uncrushed from its surface and fly as he flew then. 1.

. . . it was a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding. The look suggested isolation, but it revealed something more. As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray. 2.

That the Prometheus myth forms an integral part of the story is suggested by these examples, and I think proved by the number of similar examples to be found. What is

1. Ch. IV,6. My italics. The passages is indebted to a note (Literary Notebook I) which Hardy made from G.J.Wood, Ants: "Many successive generations of ants continue to use the same track they have once taken to. I have been shown ant-roads by old men who state that they have been familiar with these from their earliest recollections".

2. Ch. II,6. My italics.

not apparent is their relevance to any of the figures who live and struggle in the work. And so far from strengthening the work, they would be a fundamental blemish if we were to attempt to interpret the plot in terms of human rebellion against an unjust god or gods. The rebellion, in fact, is not rebellion on the part of Hardy's characters, but on the part of Hardy himself. And what he rebels against is not God or the gods, since he has already abandoned any notion of either, but an objectified metaphor for views he feels compelled to accept, but can only accept with reluctance. Nor does this apparent "intrusion" of Hardy's damage the work. It is, in fact, its chief source of strength, for the mating of Clym and Eustacia on remote Egdon Heath provided him with a satisfactory "objective correlative" for his resentment, and indeed, justified some of the less credible sections of the plot.

In his dramatisation of the roles of reason and passion Hardy has taken a major step since Far From the Madding Crowd. There, as we have seen, and at one level of The Return of the Native, Hardy gives reason a superior moral position, and indeed comes very close to implying that the act of rational decision is a natural function which it is our duty to exercise. In the later work, however, reason and passion are on more even terms: there is still, because of the force of Hardy's earlier notions, a tendency to give greater moral superiority to reason (the failure of his characters to choose rationally, for example, is clearly indicated), but Hardy is more preoccupied with the mutual destructiveness of reason and passion. And it may be

that he had in mind a further development of these ideas. For The Return of the Native recognises that reason itself is a product of evolution, and it is possible, at least, that Hardy wondered on what moral basis the superiority of reason could rest if deprived of its supposedly divine origin. Certainly even the step which he directly expresses implies recognition which modern philosophy takes very seriously indeed. A popular work on Existentialism sums up the point:

Steeped as our age is in the ideas of evolution, we have not yet become accustomed to the idea that consciousness itself is something that has evolved through long centuries, and that even to-day, with us, is still evolving. Only in this century, through modern psychology, have we learned how precarious a hold consciousness may exert upon life, and we are more acutely aware, therefore, what a precious deal of history, and of effort, was required for this elaboration, and what creative leaps were necessary at certain times to extend it beyond its habitual territory. 1.

"Only in this century?" -- yet in 1878 we have Hardy adumbrating precisely this idea (and later developing it until the whole conception of The Dynasts emerges from it), and doing so in very much his own characteristic mood:

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusionive centuries has permanently ~~dis~~ displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it might be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary man is in by their operation. 2. *that*

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1. William Barrett, Irrational Man, New York, 1962, p. 82.
 2. Ch. III, 1.

The notion is a modern one, and Hardy's response to it is deeply personal, seeing his own personal moods as a product of history, generalising from his own experiences to create a melancholy view of the mood of his own age. That this view of reason made a powerful impression upon Hardy, and that it belongs among the deepest of the "personal impressions" which made up the fabric of his beliefs, is proved by the frequency with which he repeated the idea elsewhere. In the preface to The Dynasts he speaks of modern man "unhappily perplexed by --

Riddles of Death Thebes never knew . . ."

and the poems provide numerous other instances:

When you slowly emerged from the den of Time,
And gained percipience as you grew . . . 1.

Sense-sealed I have wrought without a guess
That I evolved a consciousness . . . 2.

Man's mounting of mindsight I checked not,
Till range of his vision
Now tops my intent . . . 3.

. . . the ancient faith's rejection
Under the sure, unhasting, steady stress
Of Reason's movement . . . 4.

In the poems, too, we find an expression of the effects on man of this growth of perception:

A time there was -- as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell--
Before the birth of consciousness
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings,

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1. "A Plaint to Man", C.P. 306.
 2. "New Year's Eve", C.P. 260.
 3. "The Mother Mourns", C.P. 101.
 4. "A Cathedral Facade at Midnight", C.P. 666.

None cared, whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced, no heart was wrung;
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
Ere nescience shall be re-affirmed
How long, how long? 1.

Some of these references are, of course, concerned not only with reason but with consciousness itself, every kind of perception. Yet I think it is clear that Hardy has in mind primarily man's ability to reason out his situation in a godless and disorderly world, and the effects which this may have upon his perception. This is certainly true of The Return of the Native, where a key passage discusses the change in terms of aesthetics:

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer/harmony with external things (and closer wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vine-yards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand-dunes of Scheveningen. 2.

The notion, too, that the evolution of reason is a

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1. "Before Life and After", C.P. 260.
2. Ch. I, 1.

continuing process, a process of becoming rather than of being, is equally clearly stated:

In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period ~~of~~^{to} art hereafter, its Pheidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type. Physically beautiful men -- the glory of the race when it was young -- are almost an anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise.

1.

Finally, we should note that Hardy sees the development in The Return as well as in the poems as a tragic development:

He already showed that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here.

2.

I have devoted some time to illustrating Hardy's preoccupation with the growth of reason because The Return of the Native makes no sense unless one takes it into account as a major feature of the novel.

1. Ch. III, 1. The notion is repeated in Chapter I of A Laodicean.

2. Ch. II, 6.

It is this, and not some ill-defined need to create a Greek drama of chance and fate, which determined Hardy's drastic re-organisation of the book, and it is this which ultimately saves it from failure. For The Return of the Native is an imaginative, and ⁱⁿ some senses allegorical, study of the "mutually destructive interdependence of spirit and flesh". Seen in these terms the relative failure ~~of~~ to transform local gentility into figures of Promethean grandeur matters less: Thomasin, Mrs Yeobright, Wildeve, Diggory Venn, all lose significance, it is true, because they are scarcely adequate to the framework which Hardy depicts. But if we look for a tragedy of chance and fate then Eustacia and Clym sink into insignificance also (in seeing Eustacia as a good matron in a boarding-school Clym, indeed, is almost half-witted, and Eustacia's belief that he will take her to Paris is scarcely more credible). But if we look for a drama of the spirit and the flesh, in the terms I have suggested, then Clym and Eustacia not merely gain enormously, they also become vitally integrated with the author's personal observations. The lengthy discursive passages imbedded in the description of the heath, and the portraits of Clym's face, also take on a new freshness and significance for the work.

The Return of the Native is concerned with Time, and the evolution of consciousness within Time. It is concerned with the demands of the mind and the spirit, and the incompatible demands of the flesh. And Hardy's method of dramatising this is notably close to his method in

the poem "The Convergence of the Twain",¹ where concrete realities, the 'Titanic' and the iceberg, signify cosmic abstractions. The realities of The Return are Egdon, Clym, and Eustacia. Without wishing to schematise the plot too rigidly, it is nonetheless possible -- indeed, essential -- to regard the Heath as representative of the background of Space and Time, and Clym and Eustacia are representatives of different phases of existence within Time, Clym representing the "modern type" and Eustacia representing "that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations". One is, of course, aware of what actually happens to Eustacia, and so far from weakening my case her fate strengthens it. John Paterson claimed that "The Return of the Native ~~XXXXXXXX~~ dramatizes the predestined failure of consciousness in an unconscious universe"² -- in fact, it dramatises the inevitable collapse of outdated views of existence at a time when those views have become visibly incompatible with the "coil of things"; and I would prefer to say, of one level at least, that it dramatises the vital necessity of consciousness in an unconscious universe. Eustacia is certainly the tragic heroine, but she is so because she objectifies Hardy's resentment, or at the very least, his regret, after the destruction of a personal level of his own "zest for existence", and on a universal level the inevitable destruction of the romantic view of life, which failed to take the facts into account. The book marks a major stage in Hardy's thought: a stage which may very well be almost wholly pessimistic, but

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C.P. 288.
2. op.cit., p. 125.

is nonehheless Hardy's first attempt to "take a full look at the Worst"¹ in the hope that amelioration would come that way:

. . . would men look at true things,
And unilluded view things,
And count to bear undue things,

The real might mend the seeming,
Facts better their foredeeming,
And Life its disesteeming. 2.

The evidence for the case I have put forward is the text, and only the text; and it consists entirely of the terms in which Clym and Eustacia are drawn, and the relationships which exist between those terms and the description of Egdon Heath.

Egdon, while it possesses "an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim", and sums up in its past the geological and historical past of mankind, is also representative of modern man in its essentially modern appeal: this modern appeal is set against the youthful zest for existence of earlier times by direct statement, and indeed by direct contrast with the objects of Eustacia's passion for escape, objectified first of all by Budmouth:

[Budmouth] if truly mirrored in the minds of the heath-folk, must have combined, in a charming and indescribable manner, a Carthaginian bustle of building with ■ Tarentine luxuriousness and Baian health and beauty. 3.

Between these two extremes of aesthetic perception, and accounting for them, comes the whole history of man's emotional and spiritual development, and the test of modern man's ability to survive lies in his ability to see and respond to Egdon for what it is: not merely a

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1. C.P. 154.
2. C.P. 262.
3. Ch. I, 10.

geographical background, or even a representative only of historical time, but a norm of perception against which one's perception of the modern world may be gauged.

"The number of their years", Hardy writes, "may have adequately summed up Jared, Mahalaleel, and the rest of the antediluvians, but the age of a modern man is to be measured by the intensity of his experience",¹ and in man's perception of Egdon is expressed his perception of experience. Hardy does not deny the reality of Budmouth, Paris, or the Mediterranean south, but he does deny their validity as representatives of the modern mood.²

The "Hellenic idea of life", the "old-fashioned revelling in the general situation" is dead, or "grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quondam man is in by their operation".

It is not surprising, then, that in Eustacia's rejection of the heath we should see her as representative of an immature, and essentially unreal, mode of perception. At the most straightforward level she shows her inability to face an existing situation; at a deeper level she shows her inability to survive. Hardy might have written of her, as he writes of the reddleman, that she fills a place in the world which "the dodo occupied in the world of animals . . . a curious, interesting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which now prevail".³ We thus find that he most commonly identifies her with images of fire, and the Promethean rebellion which Clym has specifically rejected,⁴ or with

1. Ch. II, 6.

2. See M.A. Goldberg, "Hardy's Double-Visioned Universe", Essays in Criticism, VII, 1957, pp. 374-382.

3. Ch. I, 2.

4. Ch. IV, 2.

images of the Hellenist, romantic, or escapist ideal. Sometimes the fire-imagery is dramatic, more often it is unobtrusive:¹ the most striking is her use of fire as a principal instrument in her rebellion against her situation, when she summons Wildeve to the bonfire before her grandfather's cottage; and perhaps we may see her as a victim of the fire which Susan Nonsuch uses for the burning of her effigy. In her rejection of what she imagines to be an ill-deserved fate she is willing to rebel against the gods, blaming heaven, some colossal Prince of the World, and the cruel obstructiveness of all about her, and in this, too, she is out of tune with a time that demands the maximum awareness of man's responsibility and his potential. At the same time Hardy heaps upon her beauty a series of historical and classical allusions, identifying her with the glories of ■ past civilisations, the beauty of exotic (and thus outdated) landscapes, and the nature of rebellious and romantic women. She is compared to Artemis, Athena, and Hera, she might have been a fitting divinity for Olympus, "one had fancied that such lip-curves were mostly lurking underground in the South as fragments of forgotten marbles", her skin is like Parian marble, her presence reminds one of Bourbon roses and rubies, and Hardy even endows her with a nobility of birth, linking her with an ancient English, as well as a classical Mediterranean ancestry. There can be little wonder that Egdon is her Hades, or that its sublimity can be compared to the facade of a prison. Eustacia is, too,

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1. In the Library edition such images occur on pp. 71, 75, 79, 104, 107, 137, 215, 216-7, to select only some.

identified with older practices; partly by association, as by the crude local superstition which regards her as a witch, and more directly and dramatically through the genuine Satanic attributes which she is given: the hour-glass, traditionally a property of Satan,¹ and her wish to exult over Wildeve by calling him up as "the Witch of Endor called up Samuel".²

Against all this the imagery bestowed upon Clym is remarkable for its absence. He identifies with Oedipus, blinded and apparently guilty of a crime against his mother; he is a John the Baptist who takes ennoblement rather than repentance for his text; and in his blindness and his revival after near-drowning he is compared to Lazarus. These images are all relevant only to their immediate situation, and one can only feel that they are deliberately deprived of the wider resonance of the images applied to Eustacia. For the greater part Clym is cut off from the traditions which Eustacia represents, both by his situation in the modern world (which Eustacia shares without sharing his perception) and by his own choice in deliberately rejecting the world of romance and unreality for which Eustacia longs. Like the heath, his face is "overlaid with legible meanings" more relevant to his own experience than to an alien civilisation; he is "wild and ascetic"; his kinship with the heath is continually stressed until, in his garb as a furze-cutter he becomes absorbed by it. He invokes the Promethean myth only to reject it. And most strikingly of all, it is he who assumes Eustacia's dominant position at the

1. Firor, pp.46, 48.

2. Ch.I,6.

summit of Rainbarrow:

On the Sunday evening . . . an unusual sight was to be seen on Rainbarrow. From a distance there simply appeared to be a motionless figure standing on the top of the tumulus, just as Eustacia had stood on that lonely summit some two years and a half before.

1.

Given the symbolic associations of Rainbarrow as "the pole and axis of this heathery world", given that Hardy sees the figure of man at its summit as "so perfect, delicate, and necessary . . . that it seemed to be the only obvious justification" of its outline, and I think we have little choice but to regard this final metaphor of the work as symbolic of the place of a new consciousness in Nature. Hardy certainly appears to regard the death of the old as tragic; but that he believes the new consciousness to have its own morality is implicit in his equation of Rainbarrow with the Mount of Olives, and his view of Clym's addresses as "~~xx~~ a series of moral lectures or Sermons on the Mount".

The Return of the Native thus dramatises the death of older forms of perception in the struggle for survival in the modern world. It dramatises the evolution of consciousness, and if there are moments when that evolution appears to be a tragic process, it is so not of itself but because of the nature of the perception which it brings. It is because they objectify these abstractions that Clym and Eustacia achieve grandeur, and it is this additional, and systematically contrived, stratum of the book that gives impressiveness to the novel. Despite crudities in dialogue (one thinks particularly of the quarrel in V,3), despite weaknesses in characterisation, (Thomasin and Wildeve most especially), the ambitious

structure of the book, and the careful attention to the Promethean and classical allusions, are justified because Hardy has chosen a modern theme whose grandeur approaches, if it cannot equal, the enquiries of his classical forbears.

The Mayor of Casterbridge.

If The Return of the Native marks a new departure, so too does The Mayor of Casterbridge. Of all Hardy's works it is probably the most individual, and it stands in contrast to the other works, where he attempts to give a partial explanation of his characters, either in terms of environment or of heredity, or both. Thus Clym may be partly understood as a product of his upbringing on Egdon Heath, Eustacia by her Mediterranean ancestry; the same sort of explanations occur in Tess and Jude. In these works not only does the environment affect the events in which the characters are involved, but the very nature of the characters derives in part from their environment. Yet when we first meet Michael Henchard, and in all our subsequent dealings with him, we find a hero who is rootless, scarcely integrated -- if at all -- with the social environment, and totally without antecedents. Certainly his environment influences the events of his career, but his character is nonetheless a given entity, and remains unexplained however much it may be explored. Despite the indication that the action takes place "before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span", the opening of the book possesses a deliberately-rendered timelessness: the scene is one that "might have been matched at almost any spot in any county in England at this time of year", the road is featureless, "neither straight nor crooked, neither level nor hilly", and the only sounds are the murmur of mother and child and "the voice of a weak bird singing a trite odd evening

song that might doubtless have been heard on the same hill at the same hour, and with the self-same trills, quavers, and breves, at any sunset of that season for centuries untold". In this detached objective opening one senses Hardy's warning that whatever may take place in this work, and whatever social forces operate, we are to study a character in isolation, not only from others but from himself, not only from his own time but from any time. And the structure of the opening of the novel, and its swift dramatic prologue to an action of twenty years later, implies that the laws of cause, effect, and retribution may also play a major part.

For though his character remains unexplained, the social, moral, and spiritual isolation of Henchard are revealed to be the consequences of his own actions, and even more of his own nature. In his frequent stress on heredity and environment Hardy faces the mystery behind the formation of human personality: and the fact that he so clearly chooses not to attempt an explanation here, as he partly attempts it in his other works, suggests that his purpose is more than an analysis of character. In practice, and with the benefit of hindsight, we can see that his purpose is also an analysis of the influence of character upon events, and the slowly strengthening hold of Consequence over character. In a very real sense the theme of this work is closely related to the theme of The Dynasts, and despite its attention to a specific individual in a specific, named and localised society, it is also a study of human history, whose conclusions match the conclusions of The Dynasts in several respects.

That the novel possesses very real social preoccupations would not, I think, be challenged by any reader. They are implicit in the title, which significantly names not a man but an office, and the society in which that office is held. The pattern of rural change which flows as a powerful undercurrent has received much critical attention, most strikingly from Douglas Brown.¹ Yet my own view that the recent stress on the social background results, despite its excellence, in a disproportioning of the novel that Hardy actually wrote may be seen from the fact that many, probably including Brown, would disagree with my reference to the social theme as an "undercurrent". Perhaps I can clarify the matter by quoting Brown on a point where, fundamentally, I find myself in agreement with him:

Nor does the study of the novel, in my experience, deepen or increase our appreciation of the personalities there. I have read that Henchard represents a subtle intuitive projection of 'the great 19th-century myth of the isolated, damned, and self-destructive individualist', a pre-Freudian exploration of the pathology of punishment. But this is not at all the experience of reading Hardy's novel itself; such hints as we do find pointing in the psychological direction seem (once found) to dry up, to take us no further. Guerard's is a different novel about Henchard, not the one Hardy created. Hardy's psychology has the essential truth and penetration of provincial wisdom, wide reading, tradition; but not creative insight into the human spirit. So we need still to refer the question back: why this sketch (that's what we have) of the lonely Promethean figure blindly stumbling to his own defeat, taken that way by his own will-power? What pressures are at work? Isn't the figure we meet in the pages of the novel rather legendary than psychological? 2.

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1. Douglas Brown, Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge, London 1962.
 2. op.cit., p. 38.

The answer to this last question is, of course, yes. The analogies between The Mayor and the Oedipus myth, the first book of Samuel, or the legend of Faust, establish very clearly the archetypal qualities of Henchard's experience, and it seems reasonably clear, although not certainly so, that the parallels that can be drawn are the result of an instinctive literary sympathy, and not of self-conscious imitation of the past. But all this merely refers us still further back to the question: what was it that impelled Hardy to recreate this archetypal pattern?

One of the peculiar features of Hardy's novels is that they possess either a personal or an ideological basis, and sometimes they possess both. We have seen some instances of the personal basis ~~in~~ in stories whose germ may be found in the history of Hardy's family or of Hardy himself, and we shall have reason to revert to that subject again; in contrast, our discussion of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native has been based largely on the ideological content of those books. The Mayor deserves to be grouped with them, for in it the discussion of personal and social equilibrium which appears in Far From the Madding Crowd and the broad historical preoccupation of The Return of the Native find their meeting-place. The question of personal and social equilibrium as it affects Michael Henchard is possibly the most obvious; and here we shall turn to the second, historical, preoccupation. The ideological content of The Mayor of Casterbridge may be defined as a

treatment of the doctrine of Necessity, taking as our definition of Necessity:

Constraint or compulsion having its basis in the natural constitution of things, esp. such constraint conceived as a law prevailing throughout the material universe and within the sphere of human action. 1.

For Hardy the ~~constraint~~ is not total, though it is well-defined. He comments on The Dynasts that "neither Chance nor Purpose governs the Universe, but Necessity",² and he makes clear that "the will of man is neither wholly free nor wholly unfree",³ a theme which, as we shall see, The Dynasts illustrates, and which is present in a number of poems. That we have an approach to this view in The Mayor is, I believe, made clear by an image-parallel which may or may not have been conscious,⁴ but which seems to be clear, and which can be justified by the ~~sequence~~ of events in the novel.

As Henchard proposes to sell his wife the company is distracted by "a swallow, one among the last of the season, which had by chance found its way through an opening into the upper tent . . . In watching the bird till it made its escape the assembled company neglected to respond to the workman's offer, and the subject dropped". Here, at least, Henchard ~~is~~ afforded an opportunity to avoid an action whose consequences will later enmesh him. At the end of the novel,⁵ he brings Elizabeth-Jane a caged bird, which like him dies. We have here a symbolic link, and it is not difficult to see Henchard himself as a creature,

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1. NED, Necessity, 2nd entry.

2. Life, p. 337.

3. Ibid., p. 335 (where Hardy uses the word in its absolute sense) and p. 449.

4. Probably not, since the second use was temporarily withdrawn.

5. Ch. XLIV.

initially free, but now caged by the consequences of his own deeds, a pattern of consequence which appears (unusually for Hardy's novels) to possess its own necessary justice. The caged bird, dying, is like Henchard a sacrifice to Elizabeth-Jane's happiness; and its sentimentalism does not outweigh its symbolic effect. Nor is it difficult to discover the source of the symbol. Hardy is known to have read Carlyle's essay on Goethe's Helena -- indeed, he quotes it in The Mayor. Carlyle's subsequent comments may also lie behind Hardy's portrait. The passage quoted reads in full:

Thus Faust is a man who has quitted the ways of vulgar men without light to guide him on a better way. No longer restricted by the sympathies, the common interests and persuasions by which the mass of mortals, each individually ignorant, nay, it may be, stolid and altogether blind as to the proper aims of life, are yet held together, and, like stones in the channel of a torrent, by their very multitude and mutual collision, are made to move with some regularity, -- he is still but a slave; the slave of impulses, which are stronger, not truer or better, and the more unsafe that they are solitary. 1.

Only four pages earlier Carlyle comments:

. . . the Soul of Man still fights with the dark influences of Ignorance, Misery, and Sin; still lacerates itself, like a captive bird, against the iron limits which Necessity has drawn around it; still follows False Shows, seeking peace and good where no peace or good is to be found. 2.

With or without this source, it seems clear that the Necessity which binds Henchard at the end of his career was not so compulsive at its beginning, and that Henchard's

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1. Carlyle, Miscellaneous Essays, London 1872, Vol.I, pp. 137-8.

2. Ibid., p. 133, my italics.

self-destruction is also self-laceration against limits imposed by him upon himself. Necessity, in fact, implies no more than the need to face the inevitable sequence of cause and effect. It does not imply lack of choice, for it governs situations and ~~not~~, ~~maximally~~ primarily, actions -- though clearly it may limit action.

If one is right to see this as primarily a book about Necessity, and Henchard' **conduct** as an abuse of limited freewill, then our way of looking at the novel may be changed. Douglas Brown's stimulating and persuasive **essay**, for example, may appear to be misguided, since it stresses social change at the expense of character; it is difficult to see that Brown views Henchard as more than the creature of agricultural and social transition. "Henchard cannot live on the terms which the new order **proposes**", he writes¹ -- but could Henchard have lived on the terms proposed by any order? His offence is not social, but moral. Social change is an instrument, no more, and it is difficult to believe that Henchard could fit into any society, changing or stable. It is true that his initial strength in Casterbridge is that by journeying further west from Weydon Priors he is able to defy change a little longer, and to benefit from skills which elsewhere are growing out-dated. But it is also true that as change begins to affect Casterbridge we find Henchard ready to face ~~it~~, and no more at the mercy of it than Farfrae. Farfrae has the skills, but it is Henchard who has the power, and it is Henchard who persuades Farfrae to abandon his plan for emigration. As

1. op.cit., p. 43.

Casterbridge responds to change the credit is given to both men:

. . . the great corn and hay traffic conducted by Henchard throve under the management of Donald Farfrae as it had never thriven before . . . as in all cases of advance, the rugged picturesqueness of the old method disappeared with its inconveniences. 1. ^ Such

The paragraph is nicely weighed between its objective comment on the present, and its nostalgia for the past -- the chief source of Hardy's sympathy for Henchard -- but the point is still made. Change brings success to a business which is still conducted by Henchard, and the agent of change is Farfrae, which is perfectly proper, for what are managers for? Hardy specifically mentions Henchard's respect for Farfrae's brain,² and the use of the originality and skill of others is as effective an instrument for social advance as the development of those skills. The recognition of Farfrae's merit is as much to Henchard's credit as his dismissal of Farfrae is to his blame.

Of course the social background is important, and of course the Mayor's prosperity depends upon his contribution to it. But his exile from society may be traced to purely personal factors -- his treatment of Susan, Elizabeth-Jane, Farfrae, Abel Whittle, and his fellow town-councillors, who had smarted so often under his heavy sarcasm. And I doubt whether we should see Henchard in terms of his environment unless we can see him in contrast to it: he is totally alien.

Casterbridge is a town which, though in the throes of change, manifestly adapts itself to change, and builds on its past. "Casterbridge announced old Rome

1. Ch. XIV.

2. Ch. XIV.

in every street, alley, and precinct",¹ but for all that it is not a Roman fortress, not a ruin, not empty. It occupies, indeed, very much the position of the barn in Far From the Madding Crowd, as the living symbol of productive everyday life. That it is prepared to be progressive when shown is revealed by Farfrae's comment on the seed-drill:

'Is the machine yours?' /Lucetta/ asked Farfrae.
'O no, madam', said he, '. . . I merely recommended that it should be got'. 2.

As he says, "the machines are very common in the East and North of England", and Casterbridge, later perhaps but conclusively, is following a pattern of progress which will "revolutionize sowing", the chief source of the town's stability. Henchard's ridicule indicates his unwillingness to adapt; but more strikingly the unwillingness is not primarily instinctive or natural to him, but merely the result of a personal dislike:

' . . . 'Twas brought here by one of our machinists on the recommendation of a jumped-up jackanapes of a fellow . . . ' 3.

Henchard's problem, in brief, is that after twenty years he remains the same man, having learnt nothing from experience. Once he is outcast he certainly finds himself in a changed world, but Hardy states that this is not his problem:

And thus Henchard found himself again on the precise standing which he had occupied a quarter of a century before. Externally there was nothing to hinder his making a start on the upward slope, and by his new lights achieving higher things than his soul in its half-formed state had been able to /another

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1. Ch. XI.
 2. Ch. XXIV.
 3. Ch. XXIV.

accomplish. But the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities to a minimum -- which arranges that wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of ~~the~~ zest for doing -- stood in the way of all that. He had no wish to make an arena a second time of a world that had become a mere painted scene to him. 1.

He has work, the very work he had undertaken in his youth, but stripped of social dignity, of personal affection, and of self-respect, a future becomes pointless.

Yet this moral nakedness is a natural descent for Henchard. Until the end of his career he is totally unable to make contact with people, because he lacks consistent generosity; he cannot communicate because he lacks any sense of community. Society is an instrument for his ~~temper~~ temperamental and acquisitive instincts, and it is in terms of self that he looks at the world. His downfall is a transfiguration only in that his self-abasement leads him, for the very first time, to consider the needs of Elizabeth-Jane above his own. He deserves -- and receives -- admiration, because through his own criminal and irresponsible actions he moves through a range of qualities from, on the one hand, a choleric enmity or irresponsible perversity, to, on the other, a self-castigating contrition. But even in repentance there is no balance in the man -- "it was part of his nature to extenuate nothing, and live on as one of his worst accusers"² -- and in the Henchard who sold his wife there never could be balance, simply because in that act he unleashed the forces of imbalance

1. Ch. XLIV.

2. Ch. XLV.

against himself. And here one touches upon the most difficult question of all: for if The Mayor implies some moral order involving retribution and justice, what is the moral order, and whence does it flow?

That Hardy is thinking within deliberately restricted terms here is obvious. Had it been his intention to arraign or justify "the Gods" in Henchard's career he would preannably have carried his terms of reference further; but, as we have noted, he deliberately excludes such problems as the origin of personality, and concentrates only on the given character of Henchard, without much speculation on the severity of the justice to which Henchard is forced to submit. The closest he comes to such an arraignment is in his observation that "wisdom to do shall come pari passu with the departure of the zest for doing", in which "the Gods" functions as no more than a metaphor on which to hang the obvious, but nonetheless important, statement that experience is perforce accompanied by age, and frequently by disillusionment. Instead we see Hardy going out of his way to explain that Henchard's exertions are the cause, self-willed, of his disaster:

Misery taught him nothing more than defiant endurance of it. His wife was dead, and the first impulse for revenge died with the thought that she was beyond him. He looked out at the night as at a fiend. Henchard, like all his kind, was superstitious, and he could not help ~~feeling~~ that the concatenation / *thinking* of events this evening had produced was the scheme of some sinister intelligence bent on punishing him. Yet they had developed naturally. If he had not revealed his past history to Elizabeth he

would not have searched the drawer for papers, and so on. The mockery was, that he should have no sooner taught a girl to claim the shelter of his paternity than he discovered her to have no kinship with him. 1.

The idea is repeated elsewhere:

. . . if anything should be called curious in concatenations of phenomena wherein each is known to have its accounting cause. 2.

Hardy is doing no more than repeat what he had noted sympathetically from J.A. Symonds several years previously:

Each act, as it has had immeasurable antecedents, will be fruitful of immeasurable consequents. 3.

Henchard at least escapes Eustacia's fault, in that he does not blame some "colossal Prince of the World", but accepts responsibility for his own actions. Nonetheless, he is tragically slow to learn -- "Misery taught him nothing more than defiant endurance of it" writes Hardy, and the negative framing of the sentence is important and a parallel to the judgement of Sergeant Troy: "he did not attempt to fill up the hole, replace the flowers, or do anything at all. He merely threw up his cards and foreswore his game for that time and always".⁴ To say that a man did not do, or "learnt nothing more than" is to imply that he has within his grasp the power to do ~~so~~ or to learn. The recurring tragedy of Hardy's heroes and heroines is their failure to learn, and within this framework The Mayor is firmly established.

1. Ch. XIX.

2. Ch. XXIX.

3. J.A. Symonds, The Greek Poets, quoted in Literary Notebook I, presumably in 1876, since other entries at this point are from periodicals of that year.

4. Madding Crowd, Ch. XLIV.

The moral order which enables Hardy to make his judgements has no divine or eternal sanction, but is the morality of which perhaps Henchard receives a glimmering before his death. Seeing himself as a disruptive element he withdraws, and his progress from moral chaos to moral understanding may be said to parallel the progress of man as Hardy saw it. For it is man-made morality which is applied, and the laws of that morality are the laws of survival in the organism of society. It is easy to see that Henchard is in revolt, against his social environment, but perhaps it is less easy to see that his revolt, even while it chafes at universal conditions, nonetheless parallels universal conditions: the universe is itself blind, instinctive, unpurposive, and each of these terms, except just possibly the last, may be applied to Henchard himself. Society, on the other hand, at least attempts to be rational, controlled, and purposive, adapting itself to conditions which it cannot avoid, but attempting throughout to place less and less dependence on the mercy of these blind forces. The rejection of Henchard is the triumph of society.

In this pattern, too, lies the tragedy of the work, and the foundation for Henchard's archetypal qualities. For in a sense he is man, and exemplifies the progress and the limitations of man. Bound as he is by the only abstract laws which exist, the laws of Chance and Consequence, he is also subject to the laws of consciousness, and in Henchard's suffering passage towards self-awareness we can read the sufferings of an entire species in its struggles to master, crudely and ignorantly, its own destiny. The

compassion extended towards him is Hardy's compassion for all men who, to survive, must suppress their strongest and most vigorous instincts for the good of the social commonwealth. Typical of this is Elizabeth-Jane, the subject of a final paragraph which has been widely misunderstood:

. . . she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but ~~an~~ occasional */the* episode in a general drama of pain.

This teaches that tranquillity can be achieved: but only by the recognition that man belongs to a social organism from which all disruptive elements must be excluded: and the tragedy behind this is that in excluding his disruptive elements man must exclude a dynamic part ~~pf~~ his own being.

Personal and Subjective Features.

In The Return of the Native Hardy had dramatised the role of two modes of perception in the modern world, and The Mayor of Casterbridge is capable of a similar "allegorical" interpretation; but it should be noted that in these works his representative types are creatures of high sensitivity. In The Trumpet-Major and A Laodicean Hardy's concern with Time and the role of man in Time is still present, although his power is muted, and The Trumpet-Major confines itself, indeed, specifically to the past, a past seen through a veil of nostalgia but nonetheless positive and productive. A Laodicean is concerned with both the past and the future, and it expands its concern by introducing a new type to contrast with the sensitivity of Clym, Eustacia, and their kind. Potentially it is a greater book than The Trumpet-Major, yet it is more subjective and negative in its approach, and for this reason, as well as through Hardy's domestic complications, it seems an irretrievable failure. In some senses both novels are about Hardy himself: the attitudes expressed are his, and they illustrate his perplexity at his position as the last scion of a noble but decayed stock.

There may be a danger here of seeing these works out of focus, of selecting features of the work which are marginal, and of neglecting the stories themselves. But I think the danger is more apparent than real. In the case of The Trumpet-Major, for instance, the fact that Hardy could introduce Nelson's Hardy into the tale was, one suspects, a powerful attraction for him; and even if it were not, the story of Mrs Garland, the Miller, and their families was the stuff of common life in Dorset,

during the Napoleonic era. Hardy was writing of country life as he knew it, and in selecting the Napoleonic age rather than his own he was in fact getting closer to his own roots, and handling traditions which had been his spiritual nourishment. It is a mistake to see The Trumpet-Major as a precursor of The Dynasts: the later work is an objective study; the first, in its origins at least, derives from an emotional or spiritual need.

A Laodicean is an even clearer case. The circumstances in which it was written -- most of it was dictated to Mrs Hardy as the author lay seriously ill -- have made it a worse novel, but have also given us a Hardy whose defences were down. It is customary to see the early discussions of paedobaptism, for example, as the desperate gatherings of a man who is compelled to provide magazine copy at considerable cost to his own health, and whose only resource is his earlier experience. Certainly these pages are no longer easy reading, if indeed they ever were; but the fact that they are there should be an indication that Hardy, for whatever reason, is reaching out towards some of the most fundamental preoccupations of his early career. I am not here referring to the Tryphena episode (though that had been reflected in the cousin-relationship between Clym and Thomasin, and I believe it is also present in the relationship between Paula, Somerset, and de Stancy, and it also affects the portrait of Paula), but to problems which on the face of it are purely intellectual, but which the books reveal to have a powerful emotional content for the author himself. The intellectual advance present in Far From

the Madding Crowd and dictating the very structure of The Return of the Native is abandoned. In The Trumpet-Major it probably had no place; but in A Laodicean it could have been fundamental. In some senses the book prefigures a powerful theme of Forster's Howard's End, for in contrasting the decaying de Stancys with the "progressive" industrial Powers, Hardy is simply posing the question "who shall inherit the earth?" The roles of the dynamic, forward-looking men of the new generation and the sensitive but ineffective aristocracy of the old could -- and one is almost tempted to say should -- have provided Hardy with one of his richest themes. The theme never emerges clearly, and I cannot believe that it would have done so even if Hardy had been in good health (though he approached it in the far richer texture of The Mayor of Casterbridge). A more limited theme might have emerged more clearly than it does along the lines of a note written on February 17, 1881:

Conservatism is not estimable in itself, nor is Change, or Radicalism. To conserve the existing good, to supplant the existing bad by good, is to act on a true political principle, which is neither Conservative nor Radical. 1.

There are shadows of this in A Laodicean; but they are only shadows.

What we have, in fact, is a novel in which several related themes are adumbrated, but none fully developed. Occasionally, for instance, the question "who shall inherit the earth?" is raised, and Hardy appears to answer very firmly that his sympathies are with

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1. Life, p. 148.

the "new" generation:

' . . . I wish I had a well-known line of ancestors'.
 'You have. Archimedes, Newcomen, Watt, Telford, Stephenson, those are your father's direct ancestors. Have you forgotten them? Have you forgotten your father, and the railways he made over half Europe, and his great energy and skill, and all connected with him, as if he had never ~~lived~~? 1. /lived

Along with this we may set the view of the railway cutting as an object of beauty,² the telegraph wire as symbolic of "cosmopolitan views and the intellectual and moral kinship of all mankind",³ or the new and shining clock of Stancy Castle, proudly declaring that times have changed and a new era in being.⁴ But none of these apparent tributes to the modern is unambiguous. The beautiful railway-cutting only requires a change of mood to become a "dreary gulf",⁵ the telegraph wire is also significant of "the modern fever and fret which consumes people before they can grow old",⁶ and the proud new clock may signify the same:

"It tells the seconds, but the old one, which my very great grandfather erected in the eighteenth century, only told the hours. Paula says that time, being so much more valuable now, must of course be cut into smaller pieces. 7.

Even an apparent hostility to the ugliness of modernism is ambiguous: Somerset's first reaction to the hideous chapel erected by John Power is modified by the thought that the chapel has a "living human interest that the numerous minsters and churches knee-deep in fresh green

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1. Ch. I-xi.
 2. Ch. I-xii.
 3. Ch. I-ii.
 4. Ch. I-iii.
 5. Ch. I-xii.
 6. Ch. I-ii.
 7. Ch. I-iv.

grass, visited by him during the foregoing week, had often lacked."¹

Hardy's attitude to the modern need cause little difficulty. Here, as ~~elsewhere~~ elsewhere, he shows a belief in progress, but a strictly pragmatic belief which has as its first foundation the usefulness of progress in furthering human welfare. That he saw his novel -- which, perhaps significantly, is not a tragedy -- as arising from "the changing of the old order" he declared in his preface. And in a letter to H. Rider Haggard,² while regretting many features caused by the decline of rural life, he stills shows that "things are different now":

/The labourer's/ life is almost without exception one of comfort, if the most ordinary thrift be observed. I could take you to the cottage of a shepherd not many miles from here that has a carpet and brass-rods ^{to} the staircase, and from the open door of which you hear a piano strumming within . . . The song of another labourer I know takes dancing lessons at a quadrille-class in the neighbouring town. Well, why not? 2x

Hardy's most significant comment on modern progress and its uses, however, is made in the noble 'Apology' to Late Lyrics and Earlier. This, perhaps the most compressed statement of Hardy's attitude, is not an optimistic essay, foreshadowing as it does the threat of "a new Dark Age", but in his plea for a firm look at the evils of the world Hardy adds that a vital need if the lot of the "human and kindred animals" is to be improved is the diminution of pain by "loving-kindness, operating through

1. Ch. I-ii.

2. Life, pp. 312-14.

scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free-will conjecturally possessed by organic life. . . ." This seems to me to be a qualified but precise statement of the need for progress through human endeavour.

But if Hardy's attitude to the modern is clear, his attitude to the past is much less so. "You cannot spoil what is past", says Paula,¹ but the question is not whether the past can be spoiled or not, but whether it is relevant. In The Trumpet-Major the past is there, untouchable, and valued in itself, nourishing the present; and the throbbing human life from one generation to the next is more vital to the book than the historical frame which surrounds it:

. . . Although Bob Loveday had been all over the world from Cape Horn to Pekin, and from India's Coral Strand to the White Sea, the most conspicuous of all the marks that he had brought back with him was an increased resemblance to his mother, who had lain all the time beneath Overcombe church wall. 2.

The words are simple, but they ache with compassion for the humble **affections** of humanity, and against them Hardy's judgement of Napoleon as "less than human in feeling, more than human in will" is a stern condemnation. It is difficult to find this degree of compassion in A Laodicean, and yet the transmission of life and features from one generation to the next is present as a major theme. It may be that the explanation of the difference is indicated by a single passage. Paula has met Captain de Stancy for the first time, and listens to his well-rehearsed comments on the portraits of his ancestors:

In a short time he had drawn near to the painting of the ancestor whom he so greatly resembled. When

1. Ch. I-xiv.

2. Trumpet-Major, Ch. XV.

her quick eye noted the speck on the face, indicative of inherited traits strongly pronounced, a new and romantic feeling that the de Stancys had stretched out a tentacle from their genealogical tree to seize her by the hand and draw her into their mass took possession of Paula. 1.

"New and romantic" perhaps. But a tentacle, seized, "to draw her into their mass" -- these terms are cruel in their impassive inhumanity, and it is difficult not to believe that something of Hardy's attitude towards his own ancestry is unconsciously expressing itself here. In "The Pedigree", written long after A Laodicean in 1916, the family tree becomes a "seared and cynic face" controlling the poet's own actions; "Family Portraits" refers to the "blood's tendency" which is to shape his life,² and later in Tess and Jude heredity is to play a major part in the tragedy. However "new and romantic" the feeling may be for Paula, the implications of her insight for de Stancy are sinister. The "spent social energies" of the Hardys, referred to in the Life, are transferred to the de Stancys, and Captain de Stancy utters a thought which had more than once crossed Hardy's mind:

' . . . I acquire a general sense of my own family's want of merit through seeing how meritorious the people are around me. I see them happy and thriving without any necessity for me at all; and then I regard these canvas grandfathers and grandmothers, and ask, "Why was a line so antiquated and out of date prolonged till now?" 3.

One has only to compare the undated poem, "Night in the Old Home"⁴ to see the relevance of this passage to Hardy:

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1. Ch. III-ii.
 2. See above, pp. 9-18.
 3. Ch. III-iii.
 4. C.P. 253.

When the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
 And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,
 And from hall and parlour the living have gone to their rest,
 My perished people who housed them here come back to me.

They come and seat them around in their mouldy places,
 Now and then bending towards me a glance of wistfulness,
 A strange upbraiding smile upon all their faces,
 And in the bearing of each a passive tristfulness.

'Do you uphold me, ~~how~~ lingering and languishing here,
 A pale late plant of your once strong stock?' I say to them;
 'A thinker of crooked thoughts upon Life in the sere,
 And on That which consigns men to night after showing the
 day to them?'

'--O let be the Wherefore! We fevered our years not thus:
 Take of Life what it grants, without question!' they answer
 me seemingly.

'Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely like us,
 And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time away beamingly!'
 1.

Hardy had always been conscious of his heredity, but it may
 be that he brooded over it increasingly after his note of
 July, 1877, a few years before A Laodicean:

We hear that Jane, our late servant, is soon
 to have a baby. Yet never a sign of one is there
 for us. 2.

The suggestion is reinforced by "She, I, and They",³ a poem
 written in 1916, the same year as "The Pedigree", and thus
 suggesting that childlessness was associated in Hardy's
 mind with the decay of his race. The portraits of his
 ancestors are heard to sigh:

Half in dreaming,
 'Then its meaning,'
 Said we, 'must surely be this; that they repine
 That we should be the last

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1. C.P. 253.
 2. Life, p. 116.
 3. C.P. 408.

Of stocks once unsurpassed,
And unable to keep up their sturdy line.

There is an indication, too, that Hardy intended to strengthen still more the stress on heredity which we find in this novel. In Chapter III-v, Somerset visits his bank to investigate his own pedigree. Apart from allowing him to overhear Paula's visit to the bank the incident has no relevance to the novel as it now stands: and we can only assume that it was at first intended to play a more significant role.

My attention to what I believe to be purely personal and subjective features in this novel is not merely perverse, nor is it fanciful. We have already seen that in The Hand of Ethelberta Hardy used material which was probably derived from his mother's experience in London, and have noted autobiographical elements in Under the Greenwood Tree and A Pair of Blue Eyes. Their full relevance will only be completely clear when seen in relation to Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. In these novels it will be apparent that throughout his career as a novelist Hardy more and more frequently touched upon personal issues, which finally grew to obsessions, and which destroyed his artistic objectivity. Tess survives, but Jude is almost wrecked as a work of art, however powerful it may be as a personal document. In a limited sense it represents Hardy's disintegration as a novelist, though perhaps as a thinker it may have been his salvation. After Jude Hardy shows himself capable of clear and objective thought, and the intellectual strands of the novels, shorn of their personal and disturbing

influence for the author, are gathered together into a finely-woven ~~ag~~ thread of argument, which subtly and artistically presents the role of humanity in an environment of Time and Chance. My point here is that A Laodicean, perhaps because of Hardy's severe illness, foreshadows that disintegration. The influence of heredity, though powerful, is never followed through to any conclusion^{ed}. Nor, ultimately, is it more than a side-issue in the resolution of the plot. The marriage of Paula and Somerset, neither of whom has a clear pedigree, ancient or modern -- Somerset's is never produced, and Paula is untypical of hers -- simply relagates to the background a conflict between old and new which has been dominant throughout the book. Two creatures of moderate, though not outstanding, sensitivity, settle for life in a new house, "eclectic in style", for the rest of their lives. The design, I think, is apparent: both Somerset and Paula may be said to be of "mixed" ancestry, and their house, borrowing from various styles, may represent the most sensible course for men of the future: a judicious selection of beliefs, tastes, and modes of conduct, from the past. Possibly even the title, often taken as an ironic comment on the nature of Paula, may indicate that strong loyalties to the past are less healthy than a lukewarm allegiance. Yet though apparent, the design is not clear: our perceptions are muddled by a lack of balance in the book, and on the issue of the degree to which ancestry affects our conduct the book suggests much, yet avoids a conclusion. The symbolical structure of the book -- I think Morrell is correct in

regarding de Stancy and Dare as 'doomsters', the figures of Time and Chance who almost wrest Paula from Somerset's hands¹ -- is crudely expressed, and the continual wanderings through Europe, again based on Hardy's experience, is merely tiresome. It is a bad book: but it could have been a good one.

Biographical elements are also present in Two On A Tower, though they contribute little to its failure, which is simply due to the farcical nature of the plot. Lady Constantine would appear to owe something to Julia Augusta Martin, Hardy's childhood benefactress from the Kingston Maurward estate. In the 1859 preface, written two years after Julia Augusta's death, Hardy wrote of the "pathos, misery, long-suffering, and divine tenderness which in real life frequently accompany the passion of such women as Viviette for a lover several years her junior," and we have already noted the odd reference to her which was deleted from the Life:

. . . though their eyes never met again after his call on her in London, nor their lips from the time when she had held him in her arms, who can say that both occurrences might not have been in the order of things, if he had developed their acquaintance earlier, now that she was in her widowhood, with nothing to hinder her mind from rolling back upon the past. 2.

That she was somewhere in his mind while writing the book would appear to be confirmed by the naming of Swithin's grandmother. Yet old Mrs Martin, so far as she derives

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1. op.cit., p. 174.
2. See above, p.28.

from any real figure, is not Julia Augusta Martin but Mary Head, Hardy's maternal grandmother. "You should not have waited up for me, granny", says Swithin, returning late one evening, and she replies:

'Tis of no account, my child. I've had a nap while sitting here. Yes, I've had a nap, and went straight back ⁱⁿ to my old county again as usual. The place was as natural as when I left it, -- e'en just three-score years ago! All the folks and my old aunt were there, as when I was a child . . . 1

Swithin's maternal grandmother, she is closely described:

This woman of eighty, in a large mob cap, under which she wore a little cap to keep the other clean, retained faculties but little blunted. She was gazing into the flames, with her hands upon her knees, quietly re-enacting in her brain certain of the long chain of episodes, pathetic, tragical, and humorous, which had constituted the parish history for the last sixty years. 2.

Hardy's memorial poem for Mary Head shows the old lady recalling the incidents of her childhood life in the "old county", at Fawley, Berkshire:

With cap-framed face and long gaze into the embers --
 We seated around her knees --
 She would dwell on such dead themes, not as one remembers,
 But rather as one who sees. 3.

Then there is Mrs Martin's reference to her "old aunt", and one recalls that in Jude the Obscure, set in Fawley, Jude, an orphan like Mary Head herself, lives with his great-aunt Drusilla Fawley. There may, too, be a recollection of Tryphena Sparks -- or perhaps it is too fanciful to believe

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1. Ch.II.
 2. Ibid.
 3. C.P. 257.

that the name Tabitha Lark is a scarcely-veiled pseudonym. Whether this is so or not, the general point holds good that in this work, too, Hardy is gently probing his knowledge of his own and his family's past, and that in all of these central works Julia Augusta Martin, Mary Head, Tryphena, and the notion of hereditary influence are all present, and apparently related.

Yet Hardy's memories are not dominant in Two On A Tower. In 1881, a year before the book's publication, Hardy had written in his journal:

May 9. After trying to reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and the spiritual, so that they may not be inter-destructive I come to the following:

General Principles, Law has produced in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all, and constantly say to such parent that it would have been better never to have begun doing than to have overdone so indecisively; that is, than to have created so far beyond all apparent first intention (on the emotional side), without mending matters by a second intent and execution, to eliminate the evils of the blunder of overdoing. The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it.

If Law itself had consciousness, how the aspect of its creatures would terrify it, fill it with remorse!

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Yet Two On A Tower, while it shows the human environment in a hideous light, yet demonstrates the triumph of emotion over circumstances and the environment. In his second literary notebook Hardy transcribed a comment from John Oliver Hobbes's Robert Orange, published in 1900, which

1. Life, pp. 148-9.

in spite of its late date would seem to be appropriate to the novel:

The passion of love invariably drives men and women to an extreme step in one direction or another. It will send some to the cloister, some to the Tribune, some to the stage, some to heroism, some to crime, and all to their natural calling.

By any standard, Viviette expresses a natural heroism and self-sacrifice, qualities which are not unusual among Hardy's women, but which are rarely shown by him to such beneficial effect. In his aim to "set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to show that the smaller scale might be the more important," Hardy failed; but his purpose is clear enough, and the stress which he places on love and loving-kindness in this book ought not to be neglected. Viviette's act in releasing Swithin from his 'obligation' to marry her is an illustration of foresight and charity which is infrequent in Hardy's women.

Hardy's lapse is not in his presentation of the environment. All his consciousness of the tininess of the human frame emerges from Swithin's description of stellar space, and this, though self-conscious, pleased Hardy so much that he was later to versify it, with greater effect, in The Dynasts:

Yet but one flimsy riband of Its web
Have we here watched in weaving -- web Enorm,
Whose furthest hem and selvage may extend

To where the roars and plashings of the flames
Of earth-invisible suns swell noisily,
Where hideous presences churn through the dark --
Monsters of magnitude, without a shape,
Hanging amid deep wells of nothingness.

(After-scene)

. . . horrid monsters lie up there waiting to be discovered by any moderately penetrating mind -- monsters to which those of the ocean bear no sort of comparison . . . Impersonal monsters, namely, Immensities. Until a person has thought out the stars and their interspaces, he has hardly learnt that there are things much more terrible than monsters of shape, namely, monsters of magnitude without known shape . . . Look, for instance, at those pieces of darkness in the Milky Way . . . You see that dark opening ^{near} the Swan? There is a still more ^{one} remarkable ^{in it} south of the equator, called the Coal Sack, as a sort of nickname that has a farcical force ~~from~~ its very inadequacy. In these our sight plunges quite beyond any twinkler we have yet visited. Those are deep wells for the human mind to let itself down into, leave alone the human body! . . . to add a new weirdness to what the sky possesses in its size and formlessness, there is involved the quality of decay . . . 1.

Against such a background the obvious question of what use human endeavour can have becomes urgent. The Dynasts appears at first sight to state that it has no use at all, and some have seen Hardy's reading of the universe as a statement of the futility of human action. Yet this is not what he actually says:

Yet seemsthis vast and singular confection
Wherein our scenery glints of scantest size,
Inutile all -- so far as reasonings tell.

(After-scene)

...whatever the stars were made for, they were not made to please our eyes. It is just the same in everything; nothing is made for man. 1.

Both these statements, as concise as any Hardy made, are interesting for their common assumption: so far from dismissing the idea of human value, they assert it; for the universal environment is judged by its ability to serve man, and to have some place in a universal scheme possessed of divine or human significance. Man is the judge, and the horror of the universe is that in its size and formlessness human values are neglected, and indeed, appear totally irrelevant. There is no pessimism in such a view, only a stark realism; and the interest of both The Dynasts and Two On A Tower is that they re-assert the worth of human values even against a valueless and planless cosmic setting. The passages above compare very appropriately with the cliff-sequence in A Pair of Blue Eyes: just as Henry Knight's vision of man's primeval past is a re-assertion of the values of human consciousness and endeavour, so Swithin's vision of the universe helps to focus the one bright spot in the frame of things -- the superior consciousness and sensitivity of men. It would be foolish to deny that there are moments when Hardy despairs, when he looks upon consciousness as a blight in nature, and sensitivity as a curse -- there are too many poems and prose passages which present just such a view. But it would be equally foolish to deny what almost every serious reader has experienced from Hardy's works -- a sense of man's worth and the essential seriousness of his values. Even those who have seen his characters as the

victims of a malign Fate have referred to their triumph over Fate, and I think one must see in this something more than stoical acceptance.

It is certainly not stoical acceptance which emerges from Two On A Tower. Hardy's note of 1881 suggests strongly that at the outset of his work on this book he intended to produce a work in which despair was more marked ("the emotions have no place in a world of defect"), and for just this reason it is interesting to see why the book failed. For the imbalance of the work arises precisely because the cosmic background is irrelevant to the problems faced by Swithin and Lady Constantine. I doubt if Hardy could ever have successfully removed this imbalance: for the whole pressure of his sympathies led him to assert that, of the cosmic background and the human state, it is the cosmic background which is meaningless. The universe, in this book, is there only to be dismissed, while the basic problems emerge from human passions, and from simple Chance (the ill-luck which brought the premature announcement of Sir Blount Constantine's death in Africa) in which one can see again a comment on the blind formlessness of man's environment. But the basic triumph emerges as a triumph over Chance, in Lady Constantine's generosity to Swithin when she learns that their marriage is invalid, Chance is used, and an unexpected opportunity to show loving-kindness is exploited. Passion, too, is conquered:

. . . she laboured, with a generosity more worthy even than its object, to sink her love for her own decorum in devotion to the world in general, and Swithin in particular. To counsel her

activities by her understanding, rather than by her emotions as usual, was hard work for a tender woman; but she strove hard, and made advance .. It may unhesitatingly be affirmed that the only ignoble reason which might have dictated such a step was non-existent; that is to say, a serious decline in her affection. Tenderly she had loved the youth, and tenderly she loved him now, as time and her after-conduct proved. 1.

It is perhaps significant that Hardy attributes this self-effacing conduct to an older woman: his younger heroines are usually charming and flirtatious, but at least potentially irresponsible. Yet the notion of loving-kindness is stronger and nobler than love is present throughout Hardy's works, though it is rarely as central and explicit as here, and only infrequently attributed to a woman. Lady Constantine's simple act of charity is of more significance for man than the external universe can ever be, and although Hardy's theme is badly spoilt by the presence of the melodramatic brother Louis, the silly complications over Viviette's jewellery, and the farcical role of the Bishop, it has at its heart the burden of a passage which meant much to Hardy, more indeed than any other:

Charity suffereth long and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own . . .

It was a theme to which he was to return with strengthened powers, and whose greatness was to lift him once and for all above the crudities of Two On A Tower. And it is a belief which is impossible for a man to whom human life is an insignificant masquerade.

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Imperfect Synthesis: Tess and The Woodlanders.

It is extremely difficult to take The Woodlanders seriously if we regard it as Hardy appears to ask us to regard it, a drama of "grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean". The death of Giles, the essential pettiness of Grace Melbury's tastes, and the melodrama centring on Fitzpiers, Felice Charmond, and the gentleman from South Carolina, are all distractions, and unconvincing. Sometimes, indeed, there is a note of cynicism in the author's treatment of his plot, most especially in the reunion of Grace and her erring husband, and it is a cynicism which Hardy confirmed in his comments to Rebekah Owen:

...I spoke of Marty's very beautiful character, & of her being called by many the one truly noble and womanly woman in his novels. He said, "Ah well! She did not get Giles, you see; very likely if she had it would have been a different matter" (He never wrote anything more cynical than this). He further said that he could not make the end as clear as he should have done & perhaps would do in a revised edition: he found that people (I among them) did not see that he means that Fitzpiers goes on all his life in his bad way, & that in returning to him Grace meets her retribution "for not sticking to Giles". Her father hints at it in one sentence, or forebodes it, but the matter is not made manifest. 1.

The plot, indeed, is little more than a repetition of the plot of Under the Greenwood Tree -- the country girl "corrupted" by contact with a more sophisticated environment, who returns to face a conflict of loyalties -- with melodramatic additions from the later works. The

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1. Transcribed from Rebekah Owen's copy of The Woodlanders, Colby College, Waterville, Maine. Also quoted by Weber, Hardy and the Lady from Madison Square.

book was, apparently, Hardy's favourite among his works, but it is a weak performance whose chief abiding interest lies in its connections with Tess of the D'Urbervilles and its treatment of more or less abstract ideas.

That interest, however, is a strong one. More openly than in any previous work Hardy establishes a sense of the organic unity between man and nature, in terms which question the possibility of happiness within any human or natural society. The novel is the most overtly Darwinian of Hardy's books, and a pattern of struggle throughout nature is applied to man and his environment. Hardy frequently uses the same terminology for man and for his surroundings: just as the branches of the woodland trees disfigure each other, or hollow oaks become afflicted with tumours, so time brings in its strains and spasms for men, "hiding ill-results when they could be guarded against for greater effect when they could not".¹ The eternal presence of decay and the purely temporary nature of the recuperative powers is made ironic by human insistence on those recuperative powers. "Even among the moodiest the tendency to be cheered is stronger than the tendency to be cast down" writes Hardy,² and it is a theme which he pursues more rigorously in Tess. Yet this ironic delusion is one of the few which Hardy appears to regard as beneficial in its effects. His reading of von Hartmann (which appears to have taken place at the time of The Woodlanders or soon after) would have confirmed for him³ that this

1. Ch. IV.

2. Ibid.

3. E. von Hartmann, Philosophy of the Unconscious, trans. W.C. Coupland, London, 1884, Vol. I, Ch. VI.

recuperative spirit is present throughout nature, and so long as it affords some comfort it can be viewed as a source of strength. But this position carries within itself two destructive elements: in the first place, the irony may sooner or later be perceived; and secondly, disillusion may result in the destruction of the very will to live. This is not a theme which The Woodlanders directly states, but it may lie beneath the almost carelessly cynical approach which Hardy takes towards his plot, and it seems certain that ideas expressed more directly in Tess and Jude are already moving beneath the surface.

The most obvious kinship of themes between this story and its successors is of course that provided by the discussion of marriage. The preface to the work shows that the theme is quite deliberately introduced, and the course of the entire action confirms that Hardy believed that a marriage should be dissolvable on the consent of each contracting party, although he might not have put it in such direct terms. He wrote to Sir George Douglas in 1895:

I feel that a bad marriage is one of the direst things on earth, & one of the cruellest things, but beyond that my opinions on the subject are vague enough. 1.

This concern with social institutions is not new in Hardy, though it had never been so clearly stated by him; and it is not a concern which can consistently be held by one who believes that man's actions are bound and his future necessarily doomed. Hardy has been accused of inconsistency, because in his aim to

1. Thomas Hardy to Sir George Douglas, November 20, 1895. Original in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

show that tragedy may be created "by an opposing environment, either of things inherent in the universe, or of human institutions" he neglects the fact that "if man is 'inherent in the universe', so are his institutions".¹ Yet there is no inconsistency here: one of the qualities of man is his ability to create, and to change what he creates, and man's social laws and institutions are neither more nor less inherent in the universe than the reforms which may be brought about in them. A major burden of Hardy's work up to the time of The Woodlanders had been that man possesses an adaptability in the face of his environment. This is why his works are fundamentally meliorist in their outlook. Certain things cannot be avoided: there is the "destiny" which decides that Marty South shall be born to labour, or that Fitzpiers shall possess sexual charm; there is the struggle for survival waged at all levels of creation; and there is the unforeseeable intervention of Chance. All of these things are unalterable. But man's possession of reason enables him to free his social codes so that they best enable him to withstand these forces, or adapt himself to them. Hardy writes of Melbury that he

perhaps was an unlucky man in having the sentiment which could make him wander out in the night to regard the imprint of a daughter's footstep. Nature does not carry on her government with a view to such feelings... 2.

-- but there is no logic which insists that because Nature ignores man's finer sentiments, man should do so also. Hardy's view of the constructive marriage is a tribute to man's ability to use sentiment for

1. Webster, On A Darkling Plain, p.170.
2. Ch.III.

positive ends:

In truth, her ante-nuptial regard for Fitzpiers had been rather of the quality of awe towards a superior being than of tender solicitude for a lover. It had been based upon mystery and strangeness -- the mystery of his past, of his knowledge, of his professional skill, of his beliefs. When this structure of ideals was demolished by the intimacy of common life, and she found him as merely human as the Hintock people themselves, a new foundation was in demand for an enduring and staunch affection -- a sympathetic interdependence, wherein mutual weaknesses are made the grounds of a defensive alliance. Fitzpiers had furnished nothing of that single-minded confidence and truth out of which alone such a second union could spring... 1.

Loving-kindness and truth are the values which consciousness can supply; and to abandon them is to court disaster. Melbury's attitude towards Fitzpiers had been one of "confidential candour" but it was displaced by a "feline stealth" which, Hardy tells us, "did injury to his every action, thought, and mood".² The moves of Fitzpiers and Felice, though none of them constitute deliberate intention, are nonetheless all against judgement.³ In each case a refusal to use the mind causes hardship to mind and body.

We are faced again with the point of view that has met us all along in Hardy's work: the view that sets man in contrast to the natural world, and distinguished from it. The view that man's consciousness and foresight ~~are~~ are the well-springs of a tentative hope. One cannot deny that The Woodlanders places more stress on the hostility of man's natural and social environment

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1. Ch. XXVIII.
 2. Ch. XXX.
 3. Ch. XXXI.

than any of the previous novels; there is indeed a darkening of the vision. But the basic principles on which it is written are unchanged.

The darkening appears to result from an insight into the challenge of irrational sexual impulses. The fascination of sexual appeal had certainly been present in Hardy's heroines, particularly, since the beginning of his career; but a ~~strugg~~ parallel between the struggle for survival in nature and the struggle for natural selection in man, implied strongly in The Woodlanders, had previously been muted. For the first time Hardy acknowledges clearly that sexual selection may take place independently of men's wishes, and may possibly be beyond their control. The values of Giles Winterborne, however great they may be, are shown to be fundamentally irrelevant to the struggle for Grace; while Grace's position is less clearly her own responsibility than, to draw the closest parallel, had been the case with Bathsheba Everdene. Grace may be tricked into marriage by a lie (Fitzpiers deceives her with Suke Damson even before marriage), and she may also possess the feeling that Fitzpiers's fascination is an unreal thing so long as Fitzpiers is not with her. But when he is with her the fascination is very real indeed, and at no time does Grace submit herself to the whims of a horse (Elfride) or the fall of a hymn-book (Bathsheba). The "handsome, coercive, irresistible Fitzpiers" is genuinely handsome, coercive and irresistible.

Here, indeed, Hardy's judgement shows signs of confusion. Marty South's sale of her hair is a voluntary abandonment of the one weapon she possesses in the sexual struggle; and the implication appears

to be that naturalness is the chief basis for sexual success. A similar stress on naturalness occurs when John South's death is caused by the removal of a tree which has been associated with his life since its planting. There may be some kind of parallel to be drawn between these instances of a rejection of natural qualities or the natural environment, and Grace's sophisticated education. "She had fallen from the good old Hintock ways" writes Hardy,¹ who emphasises her false sense of superiority over the rural community. If this plea for naturalness is indeed a note struck by the book, the rejection of social forms is logical, since the social patterns of marriage and divorce virtually ignore the sexual drive as an instinctive, a-social force, imposing penalties where no penalty is due. Hardy's view that if Grace "would have done a really self-abandoned, impassioned thing (gone off with Giles) he could have made a fine tragic ending of the book"² implies the same conflict between natural conduct and social restraint. Yet this conflict never takes life in the work. Hardy was too embarrassed by his public, too ^mtrammelled by the conventions of his medium, or too confused in his thinking at this point; for whatever reason, a degree of condemnation is reserved for the sexual exploits of Fitzpiers, and, perhaps, to a lesser extent Mrs Charmond. The conflict is never adequately resolved. Giles dies, and his death is a direct result of social and conventional attitudes; Mrs Charmond is shot by

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1. Ch. VI.

2. Inscription in Rebekah Owen's copy of the novel.

her lover, in whom the passions are crudely -- and conveniently -- dominant; Grace and Fitzpiers suffer the mutual burdensomeness of their marriage -- he for too much self-indulgence, she for too little; and the only 'triumphant' character of the work is Marty South, in whom the extinction of sexuality is so marked that it appears as an impracticable recommendation from the author.

The same conflict appears in a more drastic and potentially more damaging form in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, a work which appears to me to present the most crucial critical problem~~x~~ raised by Hardy's novels. It is a great book. Yet as a work of art it falls more clearly into two levels than any of his novels: the ballad tale of the maiden seduced by the dashing young squire forms the basis for the book; this basis is overlaid by a sombre moral commentary which cannot be ignored, Hardy's sub-title makes a moral claim for the heroine, and his appeals to our judgement in the text make the same claim from varying points of view. What Hardy had to say in self-extension~~ation~~ after the work was published is directly relevant only to the ballad tale:

. . . I still maintain that her innate purity remained intact to the very last; though I frankly own that a certain outward purity left her on her last fall. I regarded her then as being in the hands of circumstances, not morally responsible, a mere corpse drifting with the current to her end.

1.

This much is evident from the narrative proper; the commentary, on the other hand, involves not only a statement of Tess's moral condition but also an analysis

1. Black and White, August 27, 1892, p. 240.

of the reasons which lie behind it. Hardy is not concerned primarily with the mechanics of Tess's fate, but with its cause and the moral justification for it. The issues may be clarified by his treatment of Tess's seduction:

'Tess!' said d'Urberville.

There was no answer. The obscurity was now so great that he could see ~~nothing~~ but a pale nebulousness ^{absolutely} at his feet, which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves. Everything ^{else} was blackness alike. D'Urberville stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears.

Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awaked.

Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, the wrong man the woman, the wrong woman the man, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of ^aretribution lurking in the present catastrophe. Doubtless 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. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter.

As Tess's own people down in those retreats

are never tired of saying/in their fatalistic way: ^{among each} 'It was to be'. There lay the pity of it. An ^{other} immeasurable social chasm was to divide our heroine's personality thereafter from that previous self of hers who stepped from her mother's door to try her fortune at Trantridge poultry-farm. 1.

In attempting to assess the effect of this passage one must, I think, discard any discussion of "intrusion", "order of discourse", etc.² In Tess of the D'Urbervilles the moral commentary is an integral part of the order of discourse, which imposes upon us a standard of judgement through which we are obliged to see the heroine. We may like it or we may dislike it: to pretend that it is there only as an excrescence is a piece of critical sleight-of-hand which conveniently abandons a full attempt to relate the moral comment to the work. The only questions which arise from it are its truth to the tale that is told, the degree of coherence it embodies, and the artistic justification, if any, for any lack of coherence. What is most striking in this passage is the speed at which varying attitudes towards Tess's fate are reviewed: it is seen in its natural environment, as a normal process of nature, a lapse on the part of divine providence, a pattern of 'coarse' moral fibre (though in what sense it is coarse remains variously defined), an act of ancestral retribution, and a malign stroke of fate. These responses are clearly not compatible. Equally clearly, since they are so closely juxtaposed, and because they reach out towards other contradictions in the moral comment, they are not presented for their compatibility.

Before they may be reviewed an even more fundamental question demands an answer: what precisely happens? Are

1. Ch. XI.

2. ~~See above~~ pp. 116ff.

we faced with a rape, a seduction, or a surrender to which Tess herself materially contributes? Any notion of the morality of her actions, or of d'Urberville's, must start from this point, as must any general moral to be drawn from the event.

Hardy draws attention to a number of causes for Tess's fate, and a number of possible responses towards it. The passage appears to embody some of that personal confusion which later allowed him to "rise up in the arable land of Wessex and shake his fist at his Creator",¹ but it embodies much else. Whatever reasons impelled him to introduce confusion at this point, it affects our judgement of character to such an extent that, even at the ballad level, the tale is affected by it. Tess is in danger of being undermined as a work of art since some of the judgements are false to the tale that is told; yet there are few who would question its stature. Somehow the contradictions have been fused.

Everything suggests that Tess herself contributes to her union with Alec, that she does so consciously, and half-willingly. There are extenuating circumstances: her tiredness after a day's work and the long evening at Chaseborough, and the cumulative effect of d'Urberville's persistent wooing. Allowing for these, however, Tess's nature is passionate, as we are shown in the periodic violence of her responses, the dedication of her love for Angel Clare, and the parallels drawn between her "luxuriant" figure and the oozing fertility of nature -- especially by the passage which describes Tess in the overgrown garden, her dress stained by the blights from plants.² One moment of the passage above seems to

1. Review by Edmund Gosse, Cosmopolis, January 1896.
 2. Ch. XIX. See David Lodge, Language of Fiction, London 1966, Ch. II, IV.

denote physical action: " . . . her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers". Perhaps it is subjective to regard the natural quickening of the prose at this point as indicating Alec's change from a kneeling to a prostrate position beside Tess; at least it is no more fanciful than to believe that she remains asleep throughout, as the passage would otherwise appear to suggest. And presumably, if this movement exists, it also marks the moment of Tess's awakening. If no consent were given at this point there seems little reason why Tess should have remained at Trantridge after this evening, yet she remains for a further two months.¹ She admits that d'Urberville has "mastered" her;² she admits, too, that she hates and loathes herself for her weakness.³ And her awakening to her position seems to have occurred some time after the evening in The Chase:

She had never wholly cared for him, she did not at all care for him now. She had dreaded him, winced before him, succumbed to adroit advantages he took of her helplessness; then, temporarily blinded by his ardent manners, had been stirred to confused surrender awhile: had suddenly despised and disliked him, and had run away. That was all. 4.

Her temporary blindness before Alec's "ardent manners", causing the fear of, perhaps the wish for, surrender accounts in full for the tears upon her cheeks before her fall.

We may leave aside for a moment the question, in what sense, if any, this is the conduct of a "pure" woman. Tess's conduct is natural, and that is enough: the natural setting of the Chase, the kinship between Tess's instincts and the fertility of nature, the con-

1. The visit to Chaseborough takes place in her second or early third month at Trantridge; at her departure she is Alec's four months' cousin.

2. Ch. XII.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

tinual stress on the discrepancy between natural values and social values, all point to a freedom from sin which remains intact when Tess herself is no longer so. The obtuseness, not to say criminality, of Clare's treatment of Tess, arises because of his blindness to this very purity.

But if Tess's response to sexual desire is natural, so, then, is Alec's. His role in the story is melodramatically villainous, and this works at the ballad level. Yet in terms of morality, even conventional morality, his treatment of Tess and her family is more generous than any single act of Angel Clare. The "coarse pattern" traced upon Tess's feminine tissue cannot be regarded as coarse if it is true that "she had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly".¹ Joan Durbeyfield's comment "'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God" becomes literally correct. If d'Urberville sins against Tess at all he does so in terms of the social contract, and, in the first instance because he treats her as an object with scant regard for the person she is. Socially, he knows the consequences of an illicit union, he is in a position to guess Tess's ignorance, and he takes advantage of it. But the tenor of much of the commentary is to attack the very social principles on which this judgement is founded; take away these and much of d'Urberville's liability is removed. Nor is his social offence of long duration, if Hardy is to be believed: "women do, as a rule, live through such humiliations, and regain their spirits, and again look

1. Ch. XIII.

about them with an interested eye";¹ "She might have seen that what bowed her head so profoundly -- the thought of the world's concern at her situation -- was founded upon an illusion."² Tess recovers, and the most direct consequence of her fall, her rejection by Angel Clare, is the responsibility of Clare himself, who bases his reactions on just those social values which Hardy appears determined to reject.

Almost; but not quite. For there is a level at which Hardy cannot reject social values. We may assume -- although it is questionable -- that he himself had been liberated from the relics of an orthodox moral training; but Tess has not. Much of the work is an analysis of states of consciousness, and the central consciousness is always Tess's: "Upon her sensations the whole world depended to Tess; through her existence all her fellow-creatures existed, to her. The universe itself only came into being for Tess on the particular day in the particular year in which she was born".³ Between this localised sense of existence and the ~~limited~~ broad perspectives from which at times Hardy views the story, the narrative varies its focus. No single judgement, as Robert C. Schweik has observed,⁴ may certainly be attributed to Hardy as a belief, or to Tess as a permanent state of mind. Only one set of judgements would appear to be an exception to this:

Men are too often harsh with women they love,
or have loved; women with men. And yet these
harshnesses are tenderness itself when compared
with the universal harshness out of which they

1. Ch. XVI.

2. Ch. XIV.

3. Ch. XXV.

4. R.C. Schweik, "Moral Perspective in Tess of the D'Urbervilles", College English, Vol. 24, 2, October, 1962, p. 15.

grow; the harshness of the position towards the temperament, of the means towards the aims, of to-day towards yesterday, of hereafter towards to-day. 1.

These clauses cover a range of situations which may be expressed approximately in terms of the novel. Sexuality of temperament is in conflict with a hostile social environment. Aspirations may be limited by character, as in the case of Angel Clare, over whom hung "the shade of his own limitations";² or by circumstances of birth, descent, or social rank. Past guilt, or the sense of it, may be set cripplingly against the reality of present hopes, now destroyed by consequence. There is little doubt that Hardy's condemnation of social pressures is genuine, but only of ~~the~~ social pressures seen in the context of a universal environment; there is no doubt that he recognised that even with control of events man might still, by the force of consequence, find himself in a situation where events had passed beyond his control. Wherever these themes are present in the novel they carry a total conviction which is relevant to every word that Hardy ever wrote. Other judgements, however, must be taken in perspective, weighed against these and other opposing ideas, and the balance accepted.

In this sense d'Urberville's moral "coarseness" may be clear. His sin is not a social sin, as such, but a sin against the individuality of Tess's existence since, for her, as a given person in a given situation, social pressures are meaningful. Given Hardy's stress on personal loving-kindness, it should come as no surprise to find that sin is seen solely in terms of

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1. Ch. XLIX.
2. Ch. XXXIX.

inter-personal relations, and no nonsense is involved in stating that Alec is both innocent and guilty. Against any broad perspective his conduct towards Tess has no meaning. Even Tess's experience is directly meaningful only to herself, and there are moments when the focus of the narrative is adjusted to show that her total meaning in universal terms is non-existent. Tess herself realises this at once point:

. . . 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 only act her part; making me sad, that's all. 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'. 1.

The narrative makes the same point. Tess, treated so closely and humanely at times, at others becomes merely a feature of the landscape or a product of nature, and her experience is paralleled by theirs:

Another year's instalment of flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches, and such ephemeral creatures, took up their positions where only a year ago others had stood in their place when these were nothing more than germs and inorganic particles. 2.

Both her grief and her pleasure have their analogies in nature:

She was, for one thing, physically and mentally suited among these new surroundings. The sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous stratum on the spot of its sowing had been transplanted to a deeper soil. 3.

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1. Ch. XIX.
 2. Ch. XX.
 3. Ibid.

She had consented. She might as well have agreed at first. The 'appetite for joy' which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose, as the tide sways the helpless weed, was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric.

1.

There are also times when direct statement may reduce the significance of Tess to that of "a fly on a billiard" table of indefinite length, and of no more consequence to the surroundings than that fly".² On the other hand these passages represent only one extreme in the range of Hardy's narrative. A paragraph which dismisses as "ephemeral" such creatures as "flowers, leaves, nightingales, thrushes, finches", embodies its own protest, since these words carry strong value-associations for most readers. Such values are based on a purely subjective approach to material objects, but it is in the realm of such subjective approaches that most human experience lies. In a paragraph which appears, at its outset, to affirm Tess's unimportance, Hardy reverses his order of priorities, and material objects become real only in terms of Tess's experience:

At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. Rather they became a part of it; for the world is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were. The midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and barks of the winter twigs, were formulae of bitter reproach. A wet day was the expression of irreparable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being whom she could not class definitely as the God of her childhood, and could not comprehend as any other.

3.

- 1. Ch. XXX.
 2. Ch. XVI.
 3. Ch. XIII.

The same process can be joyful as well as melancholy, and the narrative preserves its faithfulness to Tess's "vague ethical" belief:

She heard a pleasant voice in every breeze,
and in every bird's note seemed to lurk a
joy. . . . recollecting the psalter that her
eyes had so often wandered over of a Sunday
morning before she had eaten of the tree of
knowledge, she chanted: 'O ye Sun and Moon
...O ye Stars ... O ye Green Things upon the
Earth . . .

1.

In the context of a narrative whose focus is variable, religious belief becomes meaningful if it is seen as an expression of personality, and irrelevant if it is seen as a crippling social ~~restraint~~ restraint ill-adapted to the conditions of existence. Neither religion nor philosophy, the creations of men's subjective faculties, can solve the 'problem' of Tess's fall; and, once invoked, set themselves before her as obstructions in the path towards a new life. The naïveté of Tess's responses to her situation (if one accepts a knowledge of Wordsworth as probable in a Sixth Standard pupil) is realistic in its very inadequacy. "Alone on a desert island would she have been wretched?" reasons Tess,² and her reasoning has more than once been regarded as comic. It is certainly ludicrous, for that is its function. In a society whose scale of values matched the terms imposed by the environment Tess would be as little wretched in her social setting as in isolation; her reaction at this point is a childish rejection of values which she can already see to be false. Ultimately it is society which is ludicrous, and not Tess's reasoning.

1. Ch. XVI.

2. Ch. XIV.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is based, as was The Return of the Native, on a knowledge of an inevitable conflict in nature: the conflict between sentient man and insentient forces. But it steps beyond that knowledge to question the appropriateness of social institutions and social concepts as weapons in that conflict. Just as in his poems, Hardy uses a set of irreconcilables to point to parallel irreconcilables in nature. A social code which regards sexuality as in itself evil, and holds men and women responsible for impulses for which they hold no responsibility is contrasted with a view of sexuality as an instinctive, irresistible force. In this sense Tess is a work about determinism. Sexuality is neither condemned nor praised; it is merely accepted. There are moments when the 'appetite for joy' appears to be synonymous with sexuality; there are moments, too, when the "well-judged plan" of the mating of men and women is described as "ill-judged" in its execution.¹ These conflicting attitudes are unreconciled. Nor is it clear to what extent Hardy regards sexuality as uncontrollable:

Latterly [Clare] had seen only Life, felt only the great passionate pulse of existence, unwarped, uncontrorted, untrammelled by those creeds which futilely attempt to check what wisdom would be content to regulate. 2.

One could wish for greater clarity here, since the degree to which man can or cannot regulate sexual passions is relevant to our judgement of the characters of Tess. The basic discrepancy, however, between social laws and natural conduct is drawn clearly enough. So too is

1. Ch. V.

2. Ch. XXV.

the parallel discrepancy between a universe in which man is irrelevant, and a consciousness through which he becomes the centre of that universe. Tess's tragedy is that her consciousness is trapped by its growing awareness of the irrelevancy of social ordinances, and the mastering influence of her natural being.

For, in addition to sexual determinism, this work goes far to postulate hereditary determinism also. Speaking after the publication of the novel Hardy commented:

The murder that Tess commits is the hereditary quality, to which I more than once allude, working out in this impoverished descendant of a once noble family. That is logical. And again, it is but a simple transcription of the obvious that she should make reparation by death for her sin. . . . You ask why Tess should not have gone off with Clare and 'lived happily ever after'. Do you not see that under any circumstances they were doomed to unhappiness? A sensitive man like Angel Clare could never have been happy with her. After the first few months he would inevitably have thrown her failings in her face. 1.

This is more than a statement that the murder reflects qualities inherent in Tess's character; it is a statement of natural limitations in both characters. Just as much as Tess's hereditary qualities, Clare's are stressed also in the portrait of Parson Clare.² Yet that same portrait comments:

His creed of determinism was such that it almost amounted to a vice, and quite amounted, on its negative side, to a renunciative philosophy which had cousinship with that of Schopenhauer and Leopardi. 3.

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1. Black and White, August 27, 1892, p. 238.
 2. Ch. XXV.
 3. Ibid.

We may fairly expect, then, that Tess of the D'Urbervilles rejects determinism as a creed. Yet it is the work in which 'proleptic' images are most consistently fulfilled, one in which little chance appears to be offered to either Tess or Clare, and a novel in which the illusion of inevitability is most clearly maintained. The only real opportunity given to Tess to escape from the trap in which she is caught is ruined by the loss of courage which hinders her from appealing to Clare's parents. The remaining opportunities are negated by innate qualities, just as are the failings of both Tess and Clare. One may fairly say that if Tess's career is not predestined, it certainly appears so. To search for causes, however, is to come once more face to face with Hardy's search, as he narrates the details of the evening of Tess's fall. And to face this is to realise that Tess's eventual fate is caused solely by ill-adapted social ordinances: only an "illicit" union and the birth of an "illegitimate" child condemn Tess, and the words "illicit" and "illegitimate" each reflect the religious or ethical misunderstandings of man. So long as social codes fail to take account of reality, for so long does man expose himself obtusely to tragic possibilities. Heredity, economic forces, Time, Chance, and Consequence shape Tess's career, and bring about her downfall. Only social conventions caused it.

Tess, therefore, remains sexually pure, since unchastity cannot be said to be unnatural. She remains morally pure because the murder of d'Urberville, even as the product of hereditary passion, is brought to being by a situation for which Tess is not morally

responsible. As Hardy penned his last paragraph to the work his ironic appeal to 'Justice' spoke its ^{plea} ~~plea~~ to his readers to examine the social code which could both cause and condemn, and the religious code which could deny human responsibility even as it punished. In parts Tess of the D'Urbervilles fails to balance its narrative against its commentary; in parts the commentary appears querulous and ill-judged. But in its portrait of an innocent sensibility violated by social ignorance it becomes a passionate appeal for sanity in a difficult and confusing world.

It is also something more. For Tess of the D'Urbervilles embodies those autobiographical elements which had increasingly troubled Hardy's mature consciousness. They had been present in The Woodlanders, whose setting, The Hintocks, represents the area around Melbury Osmund, Jemima Hardy's early home. The comment on intermarriages, in particular, is instructive:

As in most villages so secluded as this, intermarriages were of Hapsburgian frequency, and there were hardly two houses in Little Hintock unrelated by some matrimonial tie or other. 1.

Cousinship had again been present on the fringes of the novel: we are told that Giles's father had married a member of ⁵Mary South's family.² There may be a recollection of Julia Augusta Martin in the portrait of Felice Charmond -- the lady of the local great house has almost become a stock figure for Hardy's

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1. Ch. IV.

2. Ibid.

fiction -- and Hardy may even see something of his own temperament in Fitzpiers's capacity for several concurrent infatuations.¹ These minor elements, and some major ones, are repeated in Tess. Mrs Martin appears as Clare's godmother, Mrs Pitney, "the squire's wife" (Julia Augusta had married Francis Pitney Martin); there is at least a reminiscence of cousinship in the false family relationship between Tess and Alec d'Urberville; and there is especially the notion of heredity, a fundamental theme of the work. Hardy's family is once directly named, and ideas familiar to us from the poems make their appearance:

There's the Billets and the Drenkhards
and the Greys and the St. Quentins and the
Hardys and the Goulds, who used to own the lands
for miles down this valley; you could buy 'em
all up now for an old song almost. 3.

There is something very sad in the extinction
of a family of renown, even if it was fierce,
dominating, feudal renown. 4.

I cannot help associating your decline as a family
with this other fact -- of your want of firmness.
Decrepit families imply decrepit wills, decrepit
conduct. 5.

Most of all, there are the reminiscences of Tryphena Sparks. Some of them are casual, like the mention of a chicken named Phena,⁶ or the fact that Tess belongs to a large rural family. More striking is

1. Ch. XXIX.
2. Ch. XXXIV.
3. Ch. XIX.
4. Ch. XXX.
5. Ch. XXXV.
6. Ch. IX.

the description of Tess as a child, which carried with it the flavour of remembered knowledge:

In those early ~~years~~ ^{days} she had been much loved by others of her own sex and age, and had used to be seen about the village as one of three -- all nearly of the same year -- walking home from school side by side; Tess the middle one -- in a pink print pinafore, of a finely reticulated pattern, worn over a stuff frock that had lost its original colour for a nondescript tertiary -- marching on upon long stalky legs, in tight stockings which had little ladder-like ~~holes~~ ^{holds} at the knees, torn by kneeling in the roads and banks in search of vegetable and mineral treasures; her then earth-coloured hair hanging like pot-hooks; the arms of the two outside girls resting ~~around~~ the waist of Tess; her arms on the shoulders of the two supporters. 1.

Part of the force of this novel stems from ~~this~~ quality of real knowledge, and some attempt has been made by the author to preserve it. "The name of the eclipsing girl, whatever it was, has not been handed down" he writes of ^{Clare} ~~Tess~~'s first dancing-partner;² and most suggestively of all there is the reference to "the stopt-diapason note which her voice acquired when her heart was in her speech, and which will never be forgotten by those who knew her".³ Tess's voice and her hair, though not her figure, correspond to those of Sue Bridehead, who can be much more closely associated with Tryphena; but Tess also undergoes the experience of pregnancy in her seventeenth year, and she begins a recovery from it in her twentieth, at the same age as Tryphena left Dorset for London. The phrase "it was a fault which time would cure", used in reference to Tess's mature figure, recalls a similar

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1. Ch. V.
 2. Ch. II.
 3. Ch. XIV.

remark made by Tryphena during her interview for her post in the Plymouth school;¹ and just as in Puddletown, after Tryphena's removal from her post as pupil-teacher, the headmistress had lectured her girls on the meaning of the Seventh Commandment, so Tess, on leaving Trantridge, flees from the sight of the commandment written on a five-barred gate. Parson Clare was modelled on Horace Moule's father; and in the dripping of the blood after the murder of Alec d'Urberville we may catch a reminiscence of the inquest report upon Moule's death. These are small details, but they have their own cumulative effect: and it is difficult not to believe that Hardy was consciously recalling some aspects of his earlier career. With Jude the Obscure the suspicion that he did so becomes a certainty.

 1. Providence and Mr. Hardy, p. 40.

Jude the Obscure

For Thomas Hardy 1890 and the years immediately following were years of emotional turmoil. The reasons for this were not entirely domestic. The reception of Tess of the D'Urbervilles was not uniformly friendly, to say the least, and Hardy was alarmed at the degree of hostility aroused in some quarters. In a cancelled passage of the Life he gave a startling revelation of his feelings:

The subtitle of the book, added as a casual afterthought, seemed to be especially exasperating. All this would have been amusing if it had not revealed such antagonism at the back of it, such distortion of truth bearing evidence, as Hardy used to say, "of that absolute want of principle in the reviewer which gives one a start of fear as to a possible crime he may commit against one's person, such as a stab or a shot in a dark lane for righteousness' sake". Such critics, however, "who differing from an author of a work purely artistic, in sociological views, politics, or theology, cunningly disguised that illegitimate reason for antagonism by attacking his work on a point of art itself", were not numerous or effectual in this case. And, as has been stated, they were overpowered by the current of dumb opinion.

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There were domestic sadnesses also. A number of Hardy's relatives died, including his father on July 10, 1892. His marriage was clearly not going well -- though the final estrangement caused by Jude the Obscure was still to come -- and his thoughts reverted, as they had clearly done in the preparation of Tess, to Tryphena Sparks. It is probably, though not certain, that Hardy had had no contact with Tryphena since his marriage, although his friend Eden Philpotts, who later wrote a novel called

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1. Florence Hardy's "Notes for the Life of Thomas Hardy", Dorset County Museum.

Tryphena¹ lived close to the Gale home at Topsham. Nonetheless, on March 13, 1890, in a train bound for London, Hardy began a poem to Tryphena, "Not a line of her writing have I",² though he completed only the first few lines of it at this time. In the Life he described this as a "curious instance of sympathetic telepathy" -- the quality he describes as existing between Jude and Sue. Six days later, on Monday, March 19, Tryphena died. In the following July Hardy and his brother cycled to the cemetery at Topsham to lay a wreath on her grave. The occasion was recalled by Tryphena's daughter:

...when I first saw Thomas Hardy it was after my Mother died and I was thirteen years old. It was a lovely hot day and Hardy and Henry called in at our home to see us and say they had been to the cemetery and taken a wreath and put it on Tryphena's grave with Tom's name and card and it stayed there for years. I wish I had saved it now. I gave them lunch, they were cycling and going back to Dorchester. Henry looked at me and said 'You are exactly like your Mother' but his brother did not say much. Henry said 'I must kiss you' and we all laughed and said Goodbye. 3.

For Hardy the visit was a poignant one. Mrs Bromell described how he winced as Henry Hardy kissed her; and his feelings are suggested in the poem "To A Motherless Child":⁴

Ah, child, thou art but half thy darling mother's;
Hers couldst thou wholly be
My light in thee would outglow all in others;
She would relive to me.

The thought is found in Chapter I-viii of Jude, where Jude projects his mind into the future to see Sue surrounded by her children; and it clearly underlies The Well-Beloved.

Strands of past history flooded into Hardy's mind.

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1. London, 1928.
 2. "Thoughts of Phena", C.P. 55.
 3. Mrs Bromell's Recollections.
 4. C.P. 58.

He recalled his courtship of Tryphena, and by association the courtship of his sister Mary by her cousin: one exploit of Mary's career at Salisbury Training College, when she escaped from the building at night, was revived in Jude. Mary Head of Fawley and her neighbours, the Edlins, were brought into the novel, and personal and place-names from the Berkshire locality were adopted. The suicide of Horace Moule, the frustrations of his career, and of Hardy's own -- these, too, had their place. Hardy's childhood wish not to grow up, his childhood reading, his very birthplace at "Mellstock, down in South Wessex", are all assigned to Jude. In fact no one who cares to study the Hardy family history, and Hardy's reactions to it, can avoid the conclusion that this work is, to a major degree, autobiographical. Not all the events, clearly, are events of Hardy's career; but the book represents Hardy's emotional history from 1868 until 1890. Hardy denied it, as have some critics since. That denial cannot stand against the evidence.

To search for objective comment in Jude the Obscure thus becomes an almost vain attempt. Hardy was not writing objectively; he was pouring his heart's blood into the work. When Jude was complete there were no more novels to write. This final summary of his experience with Tryphena -- for that is what it is -- was also the last expression in prose of a passion which became stronger, not weaker, during the years of separation. If the poems of 1912-13 are a monument to Emma Lavinia Gifford, Jude is the living memorial to Tryphena Sparks. Its effect is startling. Few novels in the English language have a more powerful impact, yet few major works are so ill-defined in their aims. Jude is almost wrecked by its subjective elements;

yet were they absent Jude could not exist.

What is the theme of Jude the Obscure? Hardy himself defined it in his preface as

the fret and fever, derision and disaster,
that may press in the wake of the strongest passion
known to humanity; . . . a deadly war waged between
flesh and spirit; . . . the tragedy of unfulfilled
aims . . .

It is difficult to apply all three ideas consistently to the novel. The love between Jude and Sue is complicated by two factors: the epicene quality of Sue; and the ancestral curse which hangs over their family. Neither of these complications is a fundamental cause of their tragedy, even though both loom large in the text. They enjoy, indeed, several years of happiness together, and it is the chance of ill-health which first undermines their happiness -- "we gave up all ambition", says Sue to Arabella, "and were never so happy in our lives till his illness came".¹ A parallel is drawn between the misfortunes of their ancestors and their own lives, but it is a parallel which is never fulfilled. Nor is it their love or its consequences which accounts for their separation.

Similarly, the "war between flesh and spirit" is a concept which has only superficial connection with the work. Jude's first marriage, it is true, lends colour to the belief that he is over-sexed, a victim of his own sexual passions, although Hardy's text makes it clear that Jude's passions are perfectly normal. His life with Sue before she finally gives way is more remarkable, and shows that he has a firm control over himself; and, despite her eventual submission to him, there is little

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to suggest that their love was damaged by his self-control, or that that control would have broken down. Arabella's contribution to the plot is partly artistic -- she contributes vitally to the cyclical movement of the narrative -- and partly as a contrast to Sue. If, indeed, she represents the flesh as Sue represents the spirit, one could perhaps construct an allegorical or morality pattern for the work; but such a pattern would add little to the impact of the book if applied, and nothing to its significance.

The tragedy of unfulfilled aims? Jude's aims are scholastic, and though his marriage to Arabella is a practical hindrance and his parentage of bastard children a social one, neither plays any part in his failure to achieve an academic career. For such as Jude, as the title implies and as the book shows, an academic career was a practical impossibility. He acknowledges that himself -- "it was my ~~poverty~~ poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten".¹ However, it is this theme of the work that is the most fundamental, and Hardy was, in a sense, justified in maintaining that the discussion of the marriage laws was simply machinery on which to construct the tale. Jude's rejection by Christminster, and the idealistic longing which survives it, are materially relevant to the death of the children, which is in turn materially relevant to the rupture between Jude and Sue. It should be clear, however, that social injustices are only partly responsible: Jude's careless neglect is also a major cause. The rejection of his academic hopes, the social ordinance which brands illegitimacy, and the domestic attitudes which lead to a refusal of lodgings to a pregnant woman play their part. But

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Jude's refusal to make practical enquiries about methods of admission to a college, the self-deception which prevents him from seeing the blemishes of Christminster at first sight ("when he passed objects out of harmony with its general expression he allowed his eyes to slip over them as if he did not see them"¹), are reflected in his eagerness to watch the Christminster processions when he should have been searching for rooms. He postpones this task until even Sue is aware that his frustrated idealism has not served them well:

She thought of the strange operations of a simple-minded man's ruling passion, that it should have led Jude, who loved her and the children so tenderly, to place them in this depressing purlieu, because he was still haunted by his dream. Even now he did not distinctly hear the freezing negative that those scholared walls had echoed to his desire. 2.

Jude's career is a career of consistent failure, with the exception of a few brief years of happiness with Sue. This much is clear. Yet no one formula explains that failure. Social barriers and social attitudes, endowed personal characteristics, and occasional carelessness all contribute. But it is perhaps Jude's greatest merit that it cannot be reduced to a formula. For it is in its portrait of two struggling and sensitive souls against a ~~whole~~ range of obstacles that the success of Jude the Obscure lies. Despite its apparent fragmentation of themes the book is saved by its contrast, at times explicit, between man's aspirations and his opportunities. The sexual and scholarly sides of Jude's nature are linked by a parallel between his ambition for learning, and his love for Sue. Christminster is an ambition for subjective reasons only:

It had been the yearning of his heart to find
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1. II-i.
2. VI-ii.

something to anchor on, to cling to -- for some place which he could call admirable. Should he find that place in this city if he could get there? 1.

His approach to Sue is almost identical:

To an impressionable and lonely young man the consciousness of having at last found ~~an~~ anchorage for his thoughts which promised to supply both social and spiritual possibilities, was like the dew of Hermon . . . 2.

In each case the anchorage is unsafe. Christminster is unsafe partly because it is unattainable, even more because it is no longer relevant. The mediaevalism of its architecture, "dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal", represents the mediaevalism of approach which makes it "a nest of commonplace schoolmasters whose characteristic is timid obsequiousness to tradition".³ Sue is unsafe because her principal ideal, for all her "modern" notions, is "a return to Greek joyousness" which is no longer possible. Indeed, Jude and Sue stand in relations very similar to those of Clym Yeobright and Eustacia Vye, the men representing an adjustment to the modern environment, the women a tradition which can no longer survive. That Jude adjusts slowly, and only with self-knowledge, that that self-knowledge involves virtual self-annihilation, is the measure of Hardy's development -- if that is the right word -- since The Return of the Native. In Jude all that a consciousness of the modern environment can lead to is "the universal wish not to live".

Discussion of Hardy's debt to Schopenhauer and von Hartmann would suggest that this is a logical development of Hardy's thought, and that the evolutionary meliorism which he came to adopt is a partial and inadequate answer

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1. I-iii.
 2. II-iii.
 3. V-vii.

to pessimistic notions to which he was more deeply committed. The evidence is wholly against such a view. There is no doubt that his reading of philosophy influenced Hardy, just as there can be little doubt that the Parnell divorce case and subsequent press comment had their effect.¹ Hardy did not live in isolation from current events, and he read deeply and seriously. But his responses, as his literary notebooks, the comments in the Life, and the surviving letters all suggest, were conditioned by mood and subjectivity. Hardy was a feeler first, only secondarily a thinker, and his reading was often an attempt to confirm impressions already formed. Nor did he claim otherwise. Jude the Obscure is an almost total negation of the message of Hardy's other work. It would be difficult, to say the least, to make a case for Jude as optimistic or melioristic philosophy; it is equally difficult to make a case for it as philosophy at all. More than anything else he wrote, this work, despite philosophical asides -- many fewer than in Tess -- is an impression, a "seeming", highly subjective, highly emotional, even unbalanced. The suicide of Little Father Time and the murder of the children are ~~examples~~ the neurotic expression of something whose analysis defied even Hardy himself; and it can be glimpsed only remotely even now. The loss of Tryphena, the suicide of Moule, the birth of the child, the failure of a marriage, the frustration of a vocation for the ministry and the subsequent loss of faith -- who can gauge adequately the effect of these upon a sensitive and brooding spirit whose inspiration had consistently been derived from the past? I have seen no adequate estimate of the power of Jude the Obscure, and certainly I cannot offer one. The most that I can say is that the answers lie here, in the life and soul of

1. See Rutland, op.cit., p. 250.

Thomas Hardy, and not in the source-books of European philosophy, or the English divorce-courts. If there is a death-wish in Jude the Obscure it may even be true to say that it represents a longing for death even in Hardy's soul -- the kind of longing expressed in such a poem as "Her Immortality", whose verses can be shown to be relevant to Tryphena despite the apparently dramatic form of the narrative.¹

Hardy's previous works, while accepting the intimidating nature of the universal environment, had nonetheless shown a refusal to be intimidated. The following works, The Dynasts above all, explore methods of resisting irrevocable universal forces. Jude, and Jude alone, appears to admit wholly negative impressions.

Superficially, Jude, like Tess, is at the mercy of social disadvantages; yet one is hard put to it to see Jude content in any society. The breakdown of his marriage and of his life with Sue are so clearly, even if incompletely, paralleled with the turbulent lives of their common ancestors that they cannot be seen as purely local and temporary features: there is something fundamental here, a force possessed by the blood alone. This force is never explained, and Hardy, as his poems show, did not know the explanation himself. He may have derived something from Weismann's Essays on Heredity, but he had no need to explore authorities to find the notion of a family curse. That he should have associated Mary Head and her family with his story without, so far as one can tell, knowing the full details of her story, is sufficient evidence that his motives here, as elsewhere in the book, were chiefly personal. Nor did he need wholly to invent the reactions

1. C.P. 48. The poem, dated 1897, was illustrated in Wessex Poems, pp. 142-3, by Hardy's sketch of Coomb Eweleaze, the Puddletown scene most frequently associated with Tryphena.

of a lonely, sensitive, and impassioned man to a capricious and tantalising woman. None of the letters between Hardy and Tryphena survive, and it is obviously difficult, even dangerous, to make hasty assertions about her character as a young girl. But the fact that the Fancy Day of the early 1870's and the Sue Bridehead of the 1890's bear so many clear resemblances should make us think. Each of these periods of Hardy's life was one in which Tryphena was dominant. But however much of Hardy is in Jude, however much of Tryphena in Sue (and possibly, since Tryphena worked occasionally in her husband's hotel, the South-Western at Topsham, she is reflected in Arabella also), nothing can alter the fact that Hardy successfully brought to life the psychology of his characters to a degree surpassing any of his previous attempts. There is a restraint in characterisation and motive in this book which is new and impressive, and it is perhaps seen most clearly in Sue's grief over her failure to respond to Phillotson:

'I have only been married a month or two!' she went on, still remaining bent upon the table, and sobbing into her hands. 'And it is said that what a woman shrinks from—in the early days of her marriage -- she shakes down to with comfortable indifference in half-a-dozen years. But that is much like saying that the amputation of a limb is no affliction, since a person gets comfortably accustomed to the use of a wooden leg or arm in the course of time!'

'... there is nothing wrong except my own wickedness, I suppose you'd call it -- a repugnance on my part, for a reason I cannot disclose, and what would not be admitted as one by the world in general! ... What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally! -- the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is in its voluntariness! ... '

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Nor are her grounds for these feelings ever given. Perhaps this is simply a reflection of Hardy's caution towards his audience, but it is pleasant to think that it reflects a natural delicacy, not about sex -- he is deliberately and forcibly indelicate at times -- but about art. The flamboyant parading of sexual motives and physiological causes of the twentieth century is tactless for reasons which have nothing to do with propriety: and no author, including Lawrence, has so sensitively and perceptively observed a woman's reactions. The same is true throughout his portrait of Sue. He can quietly criticise her -- "Tears of pity for Jude's approaching sufferings at her hands mingled with those which had surged up in pity for herself"¹ -- yet he conveys always the sheer nervous vibrancy of her nature, the fear of emotional commitment, and the desperate longing for love without sexual or psychic danger. Jude's comment on Sue is perhaps truer of her psychology than of her body:

You were a distinct type -- a refined creature,
intended by Nature to be left intact. But I
couldn't leave you alone! 2.

-- except that it is not Jude's passion which has violated Sue, but her predicament ~~is~~ a mobile, sensitive consciousness in an unconscious universe. Sue's morality, until the end, is complete: only the sexual attractiveness she has been given, and the sexual impulses which lead her to an enticing capriciousness are expressions of the a-moral. And over these she can have no control. "Sue, Sue, you are not worth a man's love" Jude cries: there is little evidence that Hardy agreed with him. Nor, to speak subjectively as a reader, could I. The unfailing compassion which penetrates this work is the greatest justification for

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1. IV-iii.
2. VI-iii.

Hardy's "descent" into naturalism, since against man's nobler aspirations nature is crude, even coarse, in its blind disregard. Neither Sue, nor Jude, nor Arabella is condemned (the latter perhaps locally, but scarcely in the full context of the work), while Phillotson's conduct emerges as heroic. Where he fails, and his rigid self-control as he regains sexual dominion over Sue approaches a failure of compassion, his motives are given and they are human. Each of the characters is compelled to bow before a force which is stronger than they, even though each of them acquires some understanding of what that force means. Phillotson retreats into social approval, Arabella preserves her gift for animal enjoyment -- in other words, she abandons herself happily to the life-force -- Sue is broken, and Jude stumbles ^{cynically} ~~apathetically~~ and bitterly towards his death. If this were all the book might be impressive, yet its power could hardly be called tragic. One paragraph alone sums up the strongest mitigating force in the work, again an expression of Hardy's personal attitudes:

'Don't think me hard because I have acted on conviction. Your generous devotion to me is unparalleled, Jude! Your worldly failure, if you have failed, is to your credit rather than ^{to} your blame. Remember that the best and greatest among mankind are those who do themselves no worldly good. Every successful man is more or less a selfish man. The devoted fail . . . "Charity seeketh not her own"'.
 1.

'In that chapter we are at one, ever beloved darling, and on it we'll part friends. Its verses will stand fast when all the rest that you call religion has passed away.'

That, despite the book's grimness, is its final impression. But it is scarcely implicit in the action. Like the grimness itself, it springs from motives deep in the author himself, conditions his attitudes to his characters, and gives nobility both to them and to him.

Hardy's Final Synthesis: Behaviour and Responsibility.

The pattern of ideas which emerges from Hardy's reading may be understood fairly readily, and in its application to human behaviour it can be seen to be consistent with the earlier novels. The notion of man and nature as parts of a single, developing organism is applied to the role of human conduct within a unified social frame, and the test of a man's conduct lies in his ability to maintain and improve that society. That this is no easy test is accepted, primarily because the total organism consists of parts which inter-act, and the effects of an action in one sphere may be felt in another. In particular, certain universal characteristics, of which death and decay are the most striking, exercise their influence and restrict the scope of individual human endeavour. To some extent it is fair to say that the early Hardy does not write simply of individuals, but of individuals within a clearly-defined social framework, and that relationship is his principal theme.

That this emphasis changes, that Hardy begins to concentrate more on subjective individual responses, is due to a number of causes, but some of them are purely intellectual in character. Far From the Madding Crowd is supreme among the "socially-orientated" works, and we have noted that in the works immediately following Hardy's attention is captured more and more by the challenge of the individual consciousness. His scope widens as his stress narrows: where Far From the Madding Crowd restricts itself chiefly to the effects of Oak's and Troy's conduct on Weatherbury society, The Return of the Native

is preoccupied more with attitudes towards time, and evolutionary development within time. Clym is a "modern" figure, attempting to avert hopelessness in the face of a higher appreciation of the human predicament, Eustacia a romantic dreamer who suffers through ignorance rather than through knowledge. The conclusion of The Return of the Native represents a tentative hope for the future, though scarcely a hope which is defined in real terms. There is, however, in the description of Clym's addresses as a series of Sermons on the Mount, an assertion that moral values can survive the new awareness.

To a degree, The Mayor of Casterbridge carries this development further: the social preoccupation is once again present, but so, too, is the preoccupation with time and with the implications of human conduct within a time-brought pattern of consequence. From this point onwards, it seems to me, Hardy's development either ceased or took a new turn which, in the fields of ideas at least, was to be a cul-de-sac. This is not a judgement of the quality of the later novels, but of kind. And the reason for this change appears to be explicable primarily in biographical terms. Together with this biographical involvement comes a deepening pessimism; a pessimism which is not ignorant of ~~moral~~ moral values but which sets those values against a universal background of increasing futility.

Yet this does not represent Hardy's final position. Whatever pessimism may be contained in some of his works, he was not a pessimist, and rightly rejected the accusation. His claim to be a meliorist is a just one. Such labels in any case interpret his values crudely, but it is in the force of their crudeness that they possess some meaning and conciseness.

The works which follow Jude the Obscure¹ indicate a re-assertion of his intellect over subjective involvement. A series of ideas which had been present to him at a very early stage now re-appear and are developed. They are based substantially on the notion of an organic, evolving universe, and upon the view of man as the centre and potential source of consciousness. They reach their most highly-sophisticated level in The Dynasts, after which they remained substantially the same for the rest of Hardy's life.

The great leap of creativity in nature which brought about the evolution of consciousness in man is seen as merely a single instance of such leaps in nature. But it is a leap which bestows upon men understanding, and from understanding they may derive power. Through a growing awareness of his situation man may apply his own gift of foresight, and in doing so he may contribute to the further development of his capacities. From being a victim of evolution he becomes its master in a small degree. Hardy does conceive of a "general will", possibly even of a "universal will", but he also makes it clear that at least part of that force is derived from man himself, so that man may consequently guide the direction in which events and tendencies may flow. He had defined this process on a smaller scale in his novels: the approach to self-knowledge shared by most of the major figures may be read as a parallel to the approach to self-knowledge among men, and in each case self-knowledge involves an understanding of the natural and environmental forces which help to condition behaviour. In each case, too, that self-knowledge brings with it the knowledge of responsibility, whether towards oneself or towards others;

1. I am neglecting The Well-Beloved, published later than Jude, chiefly because the biographical stratum of Jude is also present there, and my remarks concerning the greater book also apply to the lesser.

and where responsibility is ignored, the consequences may be tragic.

The Dynasts displays on a massive scale an attempt to shape men's conditions; on a smaller scale the poems written during Hardy's work for the epic repeat the same theme, applying it most consistently to the human attitude towards war. The ability to prevent war, by exercising one's personal will against it, is a basic theme of the epic, and it is so because it represents one aspect of the growth of a higher consciousness. The general assumption which underlies it is stated in the Apology to Late Lyrics and Earlier, with its plea for an end to pain through loving-kindness "operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life . . . " A statement of the same theme in a different context is also included in the Apology: Hardy condemns the Roman Catholic Church which

some generation ago lost its chance of being the religion of the future by . . . throwing over the little band of New Catholics who were making a struggle for continuity by applying the principle of evolution to their own faith, joining hands with modern science, and outflanking the hesitating English instinct towards liturgical restatement . . .

Such a view could merely be described as progressive liberalism: in Hardy's hands it becomes something more deeply rooted in the human instinct; and he is true to his attempt to see evolution realistically in that he does not distort his argument by an emotional appeal to human altruism or benevolence. Writing in 1924 of the League of Nations and its future, he says:

. . . there is in my opinion a real hope that the League of Nations may result in something, for a reason . . . the self-interest of mankind. Principalities and powers will discern more &

more clearly that each personality in them stands to lose by war, notwithstanding the promise of gain at first & this thought will damp prime movers down to moderators. 1.

It is easy to say that human history since 1924 has given this view an ironic twist: it would also be inaccurate. Hardy's letters and poems make it clear that the First World War had presented him with an acute intellectual crisis -- yet he recovered from it, and the above letter was penned ten years after the end of that war. The leaders of the principalities and powers of our own generation show greater moderation than appears to have been true of the statesmen of 1914, and substantially their motives are as Hardy describes them -- an awareness of the self-interest of large populations. The leader who ignores such movements presents another problem, potentially tragic and at times actually so. It is just such a leader who forms the subject of The Dynasts. Yet Napoleon is dragged down by an evolving unity among the European nations, and eventually it is a collective consciousness at work to resist further warfare which destroys him. The Dynasts is not only the epic tale of an Emperor's fall with a metaphysical analysis added, but a careful study in which his fall is seen as a corollary and outcome of a slowly-evolving maturity among the nations, who are seen collectively as a single character. There is something strongly prophetic in this vision, comparable to that of Isaiah, or, even, of Karl Marx. Hardy's theme is the beating of swords into ploughshares: more modernly expressed, he puts forward, tentatively and with some contradictions, the notion of men in an unfriendly and indifferant universe, men whose only hope lies in the

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1. Thomas Hardy to J.H.Morgan, April 21, 1924. Original in the Berg Collection, New York Public Library.

elimination of self-division. There is indeed more than a suggestion that ~~It~~ is through some dynamic of history that men's actions are determined, and if there is in any sense a ruling hand of Fate in The Dynasts it is Fate seen in terms of historical determinism, without any theological overtones whatever, and with some stress on the human contribution to the dynamic of history. The Dynasts is a powerfully humanist work, implicitly against what Marx would have called "tsarism", and passionately opposed to war for the sake of dyn^astic ends.

This approach to The Dynasts has been more or less neglected, yet it explains the whole notion of the Will slowly evolving to consciousness, and it places the epic as a logical culmination of Hardy's intellectual concerns in the novels. It substantiates in full Hardy's decision to end the work on a note of hope, nor does it exclude the unforeseen elements in the working of the Will -- elements which were rightly stressed throughout the novels.

Hardy speaks of the Napoleonic wars in his preface to the work as "the Clash of Peoples": if we substitute the word wills for peoples we have one of the major themes of The Dynasts ~~the~~ explaining why the clash of peoples is, as Hardy writes, "artificially brought about" -- and, indeed, of the novels. Not one of the novels depends on Chance alone: all spring from conflicting interests and selfishnesses whose resultant difficulties are aggravated by Chance. Thus love itself, because it is so often expressed by the will of one person attempting to influence or dominate another, or because it results in personal blindness, is almost always a destructive force in Hardy. Almost the only major character in the novels who does not fail is Gabriel Oak, whose love is patient, strong, able

to wait without hope. Against him Boldwood and Troy, both more dynamic characters, stand out as types of personal selfishness, as indeed does Bathsheba for the greater part of Far From the Madding Crowd. The same judgement would apply to Manston, Angel Clare, d'Urberville, Fitzpiers, Eustacia, and a number of others. Similarly in The Dynasts Napoleon fails because he too is obsessed by selfishness and by his attempt to mould events to his own will with complete indifference to the will of others. Nowhere is there an indication that Napoleon cares for the fate of France, as Hardy stressed by his decision to give a chronicle beginning in 1805 instead of ~~1804~~¹⁷⁸⁹ as he originally intended.¹ Whatever nobler vision Napoleon may have had has been lost, as the Pities indicate at the outset of the drama:

'Twere better far
Such deeds were nulled, and this strange man's career
Wound up, as making inharmonious jars
In her creation whose meek wraith we know:
The more that he, turned man of mere traditions,
Now profits naught. For the large potencies
Instilled into his idiosyncrasy --
To throne fair Liberty in Privilege' room --
Are taking taint and sink to common plots
For his own gain.

(Fore-scene)

That the individual can contribute to human progress is suggested here: just as Troy did nothing to repair Fanny Robin's grave, just as misery taught Henchard nothing, so here Napoleon's course is defined in negatives. For a positive view, in which we can see an individual exerting his will upon events, we turn to Pitt:

Once more doth Pitt deem the land cry aloud to him.--
Frail though and spent, and an-hungred for restfulness,

1. See Hardy's note of June 1874, Life, p.106.

Once more responds he, dead fervours to energize,
Aims to centre, slack efforts to bind.
 (I.i.3)

However, the individual plays this role because of a general realisation of the need for him, a popular appeal whose extent is stressed in the very first lines of the first human scene:

Hark, now, and gather how the martial mood
Stirs England's humblest hearts!
 (I,i,1)

At this point of the epic the public mood is local, and not entirely praiseworthy. By the end of the epic, however, motives have become more than patriotic. All across Europe the tide turns against Napoleon for grounds which are more humanitarian than nationalistic. As Ney remarks:

I should assume
 They have judged the future by the accustomed past.
 . . . They see the brooks of blood that have flowed forth;
 They feel their own bereavements. . .
 (III,iv,4)

Such an observation supports to the full Hardy's belief in human responsibility. It is a comment on the mature, if belated, judgement of an entire population, and stresses that ultimately it is their will and not Napoleon's which is decisive. As the Pitie's remark later:

Yet is it but Napoleon who has failed.
The pale pathetic peoples still plod on
Through hoodwinkings to light.
 (III,iv,4)

The point is reinforced by the description of the Will as a "Will that wills above the will of ~~all~~^{each} Yet but the will of all conjunctively"(III,i,5). It is further reinforced by Hardy's note of 1882:

Write a history of human automatism or
 impulsion -- viz. -- an account of human
~~impulsion~~ action in spite of human knowledge,

showing how very far conduct lags behind the knowledge that should really guide it. 1.

This is the recurring theme of the novels, whose characters are again and again blind to the knowledge at their disposal -- whether it is Farmer Springrove neglecting to insure his cottages, Clym Yeobright determining to be reconciled with his wife but delaying action on that determination, or Jude speaking to the Oxford crowd when he knows that he and his family are in need of lodgings for the night. The neglect of each cannot be put down to ignorance, and in each case it leads to catastrophe, and to events which are now beyond the control of human action. Similarly, Napoleon is dwarfed by events precisely because he has once understood them but has allowed himself to abandon the lessons he has learned. In contrast, the knowledge of the "poor panting peoples" develops slowly until their conduct overthrows him, recognising his power as a destructive force. Their understanding is limited and fitful; it is not non-existent. The poem "He Wonders About Himself"² makes the same point: Hardy laments the self-imposed blindness of men, and in his lament he appeals for greater foresight and wisdom. Again, we are faced with a notion which the novels have made familiar.

Of course men do not possess total freedom. Nothing we have noted in Hardy's reading suggests it, and everything we have seen in the novels rejects such an idea. Moreover, Hardy has stated it in direct terms:

The will of man is . . . neither wholly free nor wholly unfree. When swayed by the universal will (as he mostly must be, as part of it) he is not free; but whenever it happens that all the rest of the Great Will is in equilibrium the minute portion called one person's will is free, just as a performer's fingers go on playing the piano for the of themselves when he talks or thinks of something

1. Life, p. 152.

2. C.P., 479.

else and the head does not rule them.¹

Like the novels, then, The Dynasts may be seen as a discussion of the wrong use of limited freewill, and of the helplessness of men who allow themselves to be absorbed by the Great Will through the folly of identifying themselves with it, without displaying an adequate awareness of its mechanism. There may very well be a difference between the great Will of The Dynasts and that of the novels: if so, this merely represents the nature of Hardy's advance. The Dynasts interprets the Will partly as the movement of a collective consciousness; this is only present to a limited extent in the novels, where instead we have patterns of Consequence, Chance, Heredity, and so forth, all of which are absorbed into the greater epic concept.

The notion of equilibrium is common to both. We have seen it particularly in relation to Far From the Madding Crowd, where it is shown among individuals and in society. The concept differs little in The Dynasts, except in scale:

The nature of the determination embraced in the theory is that of a collective will; so that there is a proportion of the total will in each part of the whole, and each part has therefore, in strictness, some freedom, which would, in fact, be operative as such whenever the remaining great mass of will in the universe should happen to be in equilibrium.

2.

Hardy rarely, if ever, allows us to see the whole Will in equilibrium in The Dynasts; in the novels he is not even concerned to do so. There the balance which is struck is a social balance which allows men to pursue some positive (or negative) end for their own good and for the good of the community. Those who rebel against that good, pursuing their own ends in defiance or neglect of the community are

1. Thomas Hardy to Edward Wright, June 2, 1907, Life, p. 334.

2. Thomas Hardy to Dr. C. Saleeby, December 21, 1914. Life, p. 449.

ultimately expelled. Within their limited sphere Hardy's communities attempt to avoid difficulties by contrivance and adaptation; they attempt to use Chance when the moment seems right to do so, and to avert ill-fortune by preparations for the least hopeful outcome. Major characters such as Gabriel Oak -- perhaps the single instance of a major figure who becomes wholly positive in his conduct -- learn through knowledge of themselves and their environment that a combination of adaptation and skill may lead to happiness; characters such as Henchard may learn too late; characters such as Elfride may never learn. In each case men themselves are alterable, even though their environment may not be, and it is through an understanding of how best to guide that alteration, or to benefit from it, that salvation lies in a Hardyan world. Even that salvation, however, is not fully possible to a man in isolation, and the isolated Hardyan figure is generally doomed. The Dynasts, similarly, demonstrates how human wills can form a totality (represented in the novels by the smaller community) which is capable of over-riding individual wills, and which both embraces and guides, possibly even fetters, their wills once it has been formed. Even at the end of the epic poem the disease of Europe remains uncured: the After-scene shows that the continent is still a "prone and emaciated figure"; but the slow evolution of sanity among the people has been demonstrated, and the united determination to end war has been successful. Perhaps only for the moment. But evolution is a painfully slow process, and at the mercy of some forces which lie beyond the control of humanity. With all his stress on the human role Hardy does not forget these other, darker, powers.

He cannot forget, either, the pulsing force of the individual, temperamental will. The recurring conflict of the novels is the conflict between the individual and the community, and while Hardy's reason is on the side of the community, his sympathy seems almost totally at the disposal of the individual. The Dynasts, by dwarfing the individual in a cosmic setting, avoided this subjective conflict of loyalties, in a way which had been impossible in the novels. D.H. Lawrence missed, predictably, the vein of rationalism which lies behind Hardy's belief in the community, but he understood completely the challenge which such a belief presents to sympathy:

This is the theme of novel after novel: remain quite within the convention, and you are good, safe, and happy in the long run, though you never have the vivid pang of sympathy on your side: or, on the other hand, be passionate, ~~wild~~ individual, wilful, you will find the security of the convention a walled prison, you will escape, and you will die, either of your own lack of strength to bear the isolation and the exposure, or by direct revenge from the community, or from both. . . . The growth and the development of this tragedy, the deeper and deeper realisation of this division and this problem, the coming towards some conclusion, is the one theme of the Wessex novels. 1.

In its general argument this is right; only in its final conclusion is its statement at fault. For the Wessex novels of themselves lead to no conclusion. They raise a number of different intellectual issues, centring broadly on the conflict between the individual and the community, much in the terms Lawrence has used, but showing a sensitive awareness of the problems raised by man's understanding of his limited yet responsible role in the community -- an awareness which Lawrence totally misses, both in his comments here and in his own works. These intellectual

issues are treated more or less in isolation, although up to the point of The Return of the Native they may be assimilated into a ~~single~~, developing argument. The loss of this rationalism in the later works is only partly due to the challenge to Hardy's sympathies; it is due far more to the challenge of his own obsessions, and it is not too much of an overstatement to say that in ~~his~~ struggles of his later heroes Hardy was writing of himself. Not, clearly, in terms of incident, but in terms of self-conflict, doubt, and disillusion. Lawrence's point -- it is indeed the point which lies behind many of these pages -- is not disqualified by this argument; it is merely explained. At least one major cause for Hardy's sympathy with the rebellious and impassioned individual is that he was rebellious and impassioned himself. There is little in the grand old man of the 1920's to support such a view, it is true; but the novels were not written by the Hardy who lived in close seclusion at Max Gate, but by the lover, the married man, the ~~socialite~~ socialite, and the mourner of the second half of the nineteenth century.

The real point, of course, is that there were several Hardys. The early pages of this work have faintly indicated the conflicts which possessed him: the conflict between the rationalist thinker and the wistful mourner of the old faith; the conflict between the shy, sensitive youth and the impassioned wooer of a member of his own family; the conflict between the scion of a once-noble family and the historian troubled by the personal consequences of his own researches; above all, the conflict between the simple believer in piety and loving-kindness and the harsh, unsympathetic figure sometimes presented to his wife, or revealed in his personal comments on unsuspecting and occasionally maligned critics. These conflicts are

present in his works, as they were present in the life. His contradictory attitude towards the role of the individual and the role of the community is not a simple confusion, but is grounded upon a humane pity on the one hand, and an attempt to express that pity in rationalistic terms. His championing -- the word is not too strong -- of the community is not uncritical. At the very outset of his work he can see that the community may be as corrupt or misguided as the individual, and in this situation it is the individual who is called upon to provide the remedy. In the later works his attack upon the communal values is obvious, and founded partly on the knowledge that society itself was working to prevent that personal expression through which alone society might find regeneration. In theory, at least, there is no conflict between the cause of the individual and the cause of society -- in The Dynasts, and for that matter in Far From the Madding Crowd, there is no conflict in practice either. Where the conflict arises most openly -- in Eustacia, in Henchard, in Jude and Sue -- it arises from self-destructive forces within the individual and within society. In the earlier instances society still retains the power, through men like Elym or Farfrae, to achieve its own regeneration; in the later instances society itself appears to be failing. Hardy did not resolve this dilemma: The Dynasts avoids it because its theme of warfare avoids those immediately personal issues -- marriage, divorce, educational opportunity -- which threaten the individual most nearly in his everyday life, and stresses primarily the universal issue of life and death.

His immediate personal dilemma, however, was resolved. In Jude the Obscure Hardy shook off the longing for Tryphena which appears to have become stronger as his

marriage became weaker. The concern with his own ancestry remained, at least until 1916 when some of his poems centre on this theme; but for the most part Hardy entered into an old age which was perhaps not serene, but which was at least emotionally controlled, and in which it is even possible that ideas became more important to him than personalities. His intellectual faculties remained alive, as the letters and the Life amply prove; and his awareness of both the hazards and the responsibilities of individual consciousness remains. The general tenor of his beliefs, and their consistency, may suggest a degree of inflexibility, yet an inflexible mind would have been destroyed by the events of the First World War. Hardy's faith was shaken, but recovered, and to the last years of his life he retained a belief in the eventual progress, spiritual and intellectual, of mankind; a progress which was not inevitable, but for which men themselves were alone responsible. United to his environment in suffering and death, man stood in isolation as the maker of his own future. Such a vision is more optimistic than our "modern" views of man, and in its realism, its acceptance of an almost infinite number of hazards, it achieves a real and lasting nobility. The final songs of the Pities express that hope most fully:

We hold that Thy unscanted scope
Affords a food for final Hope,
That mild-eyed Prescience ponders nigh
Life's loom, to lull it by-and-by.

(After-scene)

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