

IMPRESSION OR CONVICTION :
TWO KINDS OF BEING IN
THE WESSEX NOVELS OF THOMAS HARDY

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the Wessex novels there is a profound psychological division between rural characters on the one hand, and urban characters on the other. The difference is one between involvement and detachment; the rural character is basically a part of the natural world in which he lives, and therefore evinces an instinctive sense of belonging, a confident security that comes of existing within an age-old pattern. The urban character, torn up by the roots from his rural origins, has been forced to develop the means to combat the sense of aloneness that accompanies self-awareness - and therefore he has acquired the power of Reason. Urban man has developed the capacity to detach himself from the situation, to analyse it as an extension of his own self, and then to act according to his rational conclusions. His reason clearly affords him a psychological superiority over rural man, who is incapable of separating himself from his experience. Urban (rational) man is able to perceive alternative courses of action that constantly allow him to choose whatever appears the most advantageous; detached from his surroundings, he can often manipulate rural folk and their customs to suit his own selfish ends, since the latter have no resistance to such exploitation.

Hardy's own attitude toward this conflict changes markedly as we

progress through the novels; at the beginning, there is a powerful feeling of sympathy for rural tradition - we may detect a nostalgic feeling of regret for the passing of a simpler, more primitive way of life. However, the experience of the novels quickly reveals the inadequacies of rural involvement, particularly when challenge is made by urban intruders who pay little heed to the ways of the past.

Hardy finds himself torn between the ideal and the real. At first, rural life represents both aspects (in Under the Greenwood Tree and Far From the Madding Crowd), but gradually the alienated consciousness of urban man asserts itself, until Hardy is compelled to admit the superior effectiveness of rational thought. Ultimately, urban life is posited as both ideal and real (in Jude the Obscure), but Hardy discovers that illusion prevails here also; man cannot finally escape his own nature. Thus there appears to be no escape; there can be no retreat into a more 'natural' instinctive way of life, and yet there appears to be little hope of Reason alone.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Energy is the only life, and is from the body; and reason is the bound or outward circumference of energy.

Energy is eternal delight."¹

Wm. Blake.

"It was unexpended youth, surging up anew after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self-delight."²

Thomas Hardy.

The pace was quickening; out of the philosophic bias of the Age of Reason had come as logical consequence the storm of activity known to us as the Industrial Revolution. The fusion of new with old, of scientific discipline with commercial enterprise, generated resources of human dynamism upon a wholly unforeseen scale; forces that had previously been unconsciously dissipated were now channelled and expanded with such effect that within a hundred years, the social and

economic transformation of England was almost complete.

The imperious advance of industrial innovation affected the very fabric of society, to an extent that we, as members of the Computer Age, may find difficult to comprehend. Certainly, we are able to offer intricate analyses of the various changes - economic, social and political - that occurred in the course of the nineteenth century: we can detect patterns, we can construct theories, and further supply the documentation to prove them irrefutable - and yet, when we have said all this, how much have we left unsaid?

"If the doors of perception were cleansed,
everything would appear to man as it is,
infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees
all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."³

Rational awareness, Blake tells us, is finite; therefore the highest point to which man, in his present state, can aspire is to recognize the limitations of his own existence, and then to accept the validity of all existence that is beyond the bound of self. Existential philosophy has revealed the inadequacy of reason as the key to truth, for truth is super-rational; and reason, on the other hand, is no more than a means of defining awareness, the tool of alienation. Yet reason is not the sole faculty capable of assimilating experience - for as long as the life of the mind is accorded predominant importance in our adjustment to living, we run the risk of living apart from ourselves. In a society that is gradually destroying itself through its blind adherence to the criterion of Reason,

the necessity for recognizing the total freedom of being has never been so great - the desperate need for a new harmony, as Erich Fromm points out:

"What is essential in the existence of man is the fact that he has emerged from the animal kingdom, from instinctive adaptation, that he has transcended nature - although he never leaves it; he is a part of it - and yet once torn away from nature, he cannot return to it; once thrown out of paradise - a state of original oneness with nature - cherubim with flaming swords block his way, if he should try to return. Man can only go forward by developing his reason, by finding a new harmony, a human one, instead of the prehuman harmony which is irretrievably lost."⁴

And this, as we shall see, is the conflict at the core of Hardy's writing; an awareness that to go back is impossible, to stand still an admission of defeat, and yet to go forward leads only to the discovery of further dimensions of alienation.

When we turn to the literature of another age, we must strive for the self-awareness that will reveal to us the filter of our own consciousness - the tacit assumptions concerning the basic nature and purpose of life that are manifestly impressed upon us as justification for the accepted psychological 'norm'. Individual perception depends upon the extent to which we understand, and then accept, these assumptions - preconceptions which, in various forms, have exerted a powerful influence over man's behaviour since the very dawn of awareness.

It might be argued that one characteristic of the nineteenth century was the remarkable tenacity with which the popular assumptions were seized, and the enthusiasm with which they were utilized (although the sense of conviction was perhaps a further inheritance from the confident spirit of the eighteenth century.) Undoubtedly, the bounding prosperity that accompanied this unparalleled rate of change induced a feeling of arrogant self-sufficiency; alienation was not too high a price to pay for the rewards of material Progress. At the moment when the concept of utilitarianism was accepted as a valid source of meaning, when terms such as 'value' and 'usefulness' became synonymous, the fundamental separation was complete; man had taken upon himself a new role - a role apart, and not within.

So far we have touched upon some relevant psychological developments that in fact stretch far wider than the nineteenth century alone; nevertheless, the impact of change upon agricultural England at this time was profound and far-reaching. Although Arnold Kettle is referring specifically to Tess of the d'Urbervilles, his observation is relevant for all the Wessex novels.

"The thesis is that in the course of the nineteenth century the disintegration of the peasantry - a process which had its roots deep in the past - had reached its final and tragic stage. With the extension of capitalist farming (farming, that is to say, in which the landowner farms not for sustenance but for profit and in which the land-workers become wage-earners) the old yeoman class of small-holders or peasants,

with their traditions of independence and their own native culture, was bound to disappear. The developing forces of history were too strong for them and their way of life. And because that way of life had been proud and deep-rooted its destruction was necessarily painful and tragic." 5

Only now are we beginning to reap the full harvest of what was sown; only now do we understand the fear of those who doubted, and refused to accept the optimism of those who judged life in terms of power and wealth and prestige. Thus the metamorphosis of English society was the price paid for man's physical exploitation of his independence; the scientist had shown him he was master of his environment, the priest had assured him that God helps those who help themselves, and therefore a concentration of his own rational efforts was the means to the highest end. In these circumstances, the growth of industrialization was surely both valuable and inevitable, being the manifestation of man's challenge to the very boundaries of knowledge.

And yet many thought differently:

"almost all [English intellectuals] reacted negatively to perhaps the greatest of the revolutions of the time, the establishment of England's urban-industrial society. Over the whole range of English public opinion, the rise of smoking factories and the congregation of large numbers in cities were seen as cancerous. Thus some of the major themes of nineteenth-century letters, developed for their own sake, in various ways implicitly identified urban with evil. . . ." 6

Thus the symbolic force of the antithesis between town and country begins to show itself - a force that reaches far beyond mere differences in social environment and behaviour. As we shall discover, Hardy uses the contrary facets of this social phenomenon to reveal his own insights into the nature of life, both as it is and as it should be; that this dichotomy is so thoroughly ingrained into the texture of his writing may be attributed to several different factors.

It has already been suggested that the gradual polarisation of two distinct ways of life brought about a conflict in values which Hardy saw as penetrating into the psyche of the individual, where the conflict governed his perception of life. But here again we must draw back in order to approach Hardy through all the 'assumptions' that prevailed so formidably within his environment, and presented an apparently insurmountable obstacle to any insight into the nature of being. It is for this reason that I have had recourse to the writings of William Blake, for it appears that both men shared a similar response to a common crisis, as the quotations at the beginning of his paper may suggest. It is true that Hardy is reported to have been ". . . a little repelled by the evident streak of insanity in Blake"⁷; yet if we consider the fundamentally different natures of the two men, and the contrary paths they followed to reveal their insights, then we may understand the significance of Hardy's reaction, and find an additional validity in the similarity of some of their conclusions. On one level, the contrast between the two men is apparent in their attitude toward those social 'assumptions' upon which

any moral code is founded. Blake's reaction was to totally repudiate all such preconceptions - not simply to reject them, but to brand them as stifling, incomplete, and therefore inhuman: they were no more than the ratio, which necessarily turned man in on himself, and made him static.

"If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the philosophic and experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things and stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again."⁸

Blake achieves his awareness through an initial recognition of separateness; in rejecting the 'assumptions' of established religion and morality he defies the spurious security that such institutions offer. Essentially, his freedom stems from the central re-discovery that ". . . all deities reside in the human breast."⁹

The path taken by Thomas Hardy was, in a sense, both longer and harder. His novel-writing career seems to have been a slow and agonizing discovery of the prevalence and power of such man-made restrictions, and their nullifying effect upon the natural joy of human life: and yet, despite the subsequent sense of happiness as being ". . . but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain,"¹⁰ despite the gloomy vision of ". . . the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is. . .",¹¹ Hardy was too much a man of his time, too thoroughly imbued with the Victorian spirit of rational compromise,¹² to be willing (or able) to detach himself so thoroughly from the consciousness of his time. It was almost accidental, therefore, that in Hardy, as in

Clym Yeobright, ". . . the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcass shone out of him like a ray".¹³

Here is the essential difference between Blake and Hardy; where Blake found certainty through faith in his personal vision, Hardy could never bring himself to abandon the security of an almost hypothetical compromise. This appears most vividly in the final dénouement of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, where Hardy appears to be retreating desperately from the implications his story has aroused; he is prepared to replace his vital, sensuous heroine (in whom, one may suspect, he discovered the reality of being), with an abstraction, a ". . . spiritualized image. . .",¹⁴ in order to avoid a confrontation with concepts that he was unwilling to face. With this in mind, we may speculate upon the felicity of the quotation above; like Blake, Hardy appears aware of the infinite being within man's capacity - and yet he cannot bring himself to defy convention, and pursue his vision to its end. The "deity" must remain "ignominiously chained" by the power of Victorian inhibition.

"The giants who formed this world into its sensual existence, and now seem to live in it in chains, are in truth the causes of its life and the sources of all activity; but the chains are the cunning of weak and tame minds which have power to resist energy (according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning)"¹⁵

Hardy's inability to make any 'leap of faith', to place implicit trust in the freedom of his being, may be detected in the

evasions that occur throughout the novels. Not surprisingly, we encounter greater problems in dealing with the latter of these aspects, simply because these are grounds where reason is not the prime factor; we can only respond feelingly, not rationally, analytically - and so we become less sure of our footing. The problem may be stated more concretely, by juxtaposing the different ways in which these two aspects reveal themselves. Several critics have noted the awkwardness that enters Hardy's style when he is developing a self-conscious philosophical attitude, either within a particular character, or as authorial comment. Arnold Kettle, for example, points to Fitzpiers' self-analysis when in the company of Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders, as a passage that ". . . although implying a different way of life. . . is . . . not meant to be ridiculous":

"People living insulated, as I do by the solitude of this place get charged with emotive fluid like a leyden jar with electric, for want of some conductor at hand to disperse it. Human love is a subjective thing - the essence itself of man, as that great thinker Spinoza says - "ipsa hominis essentia" - it is a joy accompanied by an idea which we project against any suitable object on the line of our vision; just as the rainbow iris is projected against an oak, ash or elm tree indifferently. So that if any other young lady should have appeared instead of the one who did appear I should have quoted the same lines from Shelley about her as about this one I saw. Such miserable creatures of circumstance are we all. . ." 16

Theory has taken control of the imagination.

Perhaps more extreme is the extent to which Hardy attempts to stretch the symbolic significance of Little Father Time in Jude the Obscure, where the load manifestly overburdens the bearer:

"He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices. A ground swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to lift the child in this his morning-life, when his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of Time, and appeared not to care about what it saw." 17

Once again, it appears that Hardy has pounced upon his insight, and circumscribed it with thought.

"Thought alone can make monsters, but the affections cannot". 18

Such passages as these are clearly intended to leap out from the page, to thrust themselves upon our attention, and indeed, when Hardy is more intuitively confident of what he wishes to convey, such passages can be wholly impressive. 19 It seems that only when Hardy allows himself to conceptualize his awareness, to apply an extraneous intellectual analysis to the image in his mind, do we detect a strain in the fabric; he cannot finally accept Blake's dictum, in 'There Is No Natural Religion', that:

"Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception: he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover." 20

As intimated above, we encounter much greater difficulty in investigating the implications of this word "more". Although our senses may occasionally deceive us, the governing factor of our reason can overrule such vagaries, and reestablish the equilibrium of 'normality'. Or maybe we thought it could, once upon a time.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. If we can for the moment equate the 'parts' with the human senses, and the 'whole' as being that interaction of the senses that we term perception - then what is the additional quality that takes us far beyond this point? For it is this very quintessence of awareness that infuses so much of Blake's writing,²¹ and it is the same quality that can be discovered, in more equivocal form, in the novels of Thomas Hardy. It may best be termed "intuition", although some would undoubtedly argue in favour of the more exalted plane of "inspiration". In a sense, the subtle distinction between these two words may clarify further the fundamental differences between the two men; intuition suggests an inward, almost hidden impulse which would enter secretly into Hardy's writing; inspiration, on the other hand, reveals itself much more immediately and self-consciously - paradoxically, it was Blake's total inwardness, his willingness to accept and glorify his own separateness as an individual, that transformed self-effacing intuition into light-giving inspiration.

"The true man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius".²²

The difficulty arises through the peculiarly reticent nature of intuition, for, uncertain of the validity of its existence - (through our reliance on the efficacy of reason) - it is constantly pretending to be something else. We generally explain this element in Hardy's writing as being 'ironic'. Yet we may at times doubt the accuracy of such a term, because there seem to be so many possible interpretations within the given situation. So when we recall that the important aspect of intuition is that it functions at an unconscious level, the interpretive experience becomes remarkably complex. For one thing, it releases us to some extent from our rigid rational adherence to the word, or the series of words, on the printed page, since that is to assume the total rationality both of ourselves and of the writer. This assumption cannot be valid, for thereby we deny the existence of intuition - the potential that exists to communicate a whole that exceeds the sum of its parts, (which are, in this case, words).

Let us take an example from The Return of the Native, in the description of Eustacia Vye, whom Hardy envisages upon a truly majestic scale.

"Eustacia Vye was the raw material of a divinity. . . She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. . . To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow: it closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow. . . Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses,

rubies, and tropical midnights: her moods recalled lotus-eaters and the march in 'Athalie'; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola. . ." 23

This selective quote is only a small part of Hardy's depiction of Eustacia, but it amply conveys the eulogistic tone that he is employing. The point is, that we may interpret the passage upon two distinct levels, and possibly three. We may accept the explicit intention of the description, which presents Eustacia as a fascinating, intense, passionate woman, who is frustrated and antagonized beyond endurance by the grim indifference of the heath. The difficulty we face with this 'straightforward' interpretation is the unnecessary over-emphasis in describing Eustacia's personality; both the thought and the language seem grandiose, over-inflated, the metaphors too rich and flamboyant.

There is, however, a second way of approaching the passage - and that stems from viewing Hardy's treatment of Eustacia as ironic, which of course throws the entire description into a wholly new perspective. For now we see Eustacia through her own mind, and suddenly the almost cosmic grandeur of the imagery becomes the immature fantasies and vanity of an imaginative girl (we must remember her youthfulness), who is trapped within herself by the indifference of the outside world. It is at this point that we encounter the integral question, that has to remain unanswered; did Hardy intend the irony, and if so, to what extent was he aware of its function in his work as a whole. If we conclude that the irony is not consciously intended, then we are brought

back to our earlier speculation, that what we perceive as irony is in fact the manifestation of Hardy's intuition. In this sense, we remain one additional step away from the essence of the situation or individual described.²⁴

The third possibility is that Hardy was sufficiently aware of the ambitious scale of his description, to attempt to rectify it in a rather ponderous philosophical manner quite apart from the irony discussed above; his efforts to restore the balance may be seen as representing another aspect of withdrawing intellectually from his intuitive perception. (see page 7) For example, after he has stated that Eustacia ". . . had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman", Hardy feels obliged to rationalize this insight, to pin it down with arbitrary boundaries.

"Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle, and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same inequality of lot, the same heaping up of favours here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alteration of caresses and blows that we endure now' . "²⁵

Considering the rapidity of industrial growth, it is hardly surprising that the reaction was correspondingly sudden - in the shape of a disenchantment with ideals that not long since had been regarded as the means to human perfection. A social scientist points one aspect of

this reaction:

" . . . the demand for education lost some of its appeal because Romantics saw as less important the rational qualities of the mind that, in the eighteenth century view, can be established or enhanced by schooling. The Romantics' antithesis between rationality and sentiment was repeatedly converted over the following decades into an antithesis of machine and "nature", town and country. . ." 26

The polarisation was deepening, and in a number of different directions; the divergence between rural and urban may have begun in simple terms of social environment and means of livelihood, but after almost a hundred years of Progress, the gap had widened immeasurably (and yet almost imperceptibly), through the constant process of psychological adaptation.

One aspect of this division was speed, as Graham Hough points out:

"One of the main results of the speeding up of the rate of change in the nineteenth century is the emergence of a vast compensatory longing for a changeless order, a world outside the historic process where this eternal hurry could be stilled." 27

There was now a feeling of urgency; a growing awareness that something fundamental to human existence was being submerged before the advance of material prosperity. In this way the contrast between the rural and urban way of life eventually came to represent two distinct types of humanity, one a debased and exploited version of the other.

At the same time, it became increasingly apparent that the two worlds, rural and urban, were, by no means independent of each other. As the factory worker pondered with envy upon the health and plenty that he imagined to be the lot of his agricultural counterpart, so the latter made his way to the town, in the hope of improving his own miserable existence in a new kind of squalor. Yet here again, the domination of urban over rural produced significant consequences:

"The great migration from village to city produced a crisis in popular culture. Though they were already deteriorating, there had still survived in the eighteenth century the rural institutions of holiday-making, pageantry, and fairs. There was still the love of the countryside and the songs and stories that had been handed down in the cottage from generation to generation. Illiterate though the common countryman may have been, his participation in the popular cultural tradition saved him from being a stolid brute. . . " 28

These remarks bear a relevance for Hardy's own life, since he expended much youthful energy, we are told, in serving the "popular cultural tradition" in his native Dorset. Indeed, we may speculate that the concentration upon matters musical in Under the Greenwood Tree reflects Hardy's close involvement with this dying rural custom; here is the tendency toward nostalgic idealization, the strong emotional impulse that creates the warmth of idyllic serenity.

Hardy's experience of London, on the other hand, was not particularly happy; although he found it stimulating intellectually, it

appears that he was gradually overcome by feelings of loneliness and depression - he was, in effect, an outsider. Thus his own experiences of urban life may be regarded as contributing in some measure to the constant theme of urban alienation, the sense of not belonging that is both the strength and the weakness of the urban characters in the Wessex novels.

The uneasiness of the relationship between town and country is particularly noticeable in the work of one of Hardy's contemporaries, Richard Jefferies. His essays upon country life are an implicit admission that the tide has turned; they represent a plea for understanding made to a public separated in every sense from the agrarian life, that nevertheless controls in large degree the fortunes of the countryside and its inhabitants. The plight of the small tenant-farmer had to be set in a larger context, in terms that brought him out of his rural insularity, and related him to the world at large.

"All this blind work of his [i. e. the small-holder] was of no avail against the ocean steamer and her cargo of wheat and meat from the teeming regions of the West. Nor was it of avail against the fall of Prices, and the decreased yield consequent upon a succession of bad seasons". 29

Like Hardy, Jefferies is a countryman (they were born and lived in adjacent counties), and thus feels a strong sense of identity with the life he describes. His approach, however, is basically factual; in his collection of essays Hodge and his Masters, he is intent upon revealing the physical and moral decline of the countryside to those who

can in some way contribute to its revival. His appeal is more to the intellect than to the emotions, and therefore, his position occasionally becomes uncomfortably ambivalent; we may detect moments when his innate love and compassion for the rural scene become coloured by his concern to please the middle-class propensities of his readers.³⁰

Because he is more involved with prevailing social conditions, Jefferies tends to present his characters as representative, rather than as personalized, images. He is not ultimately concerned with the inner man, but with the circumstances that make man what he is (in the rural environment, at least.) Although he gains insight through an imaginative sympathy with his subject-matter, Jefferies writes as a detached observer, allowing the facts to speak for themselves. Several essays in Hodge and his Masters, for example, present a vignette of a village inhabitant, and yet in each case the personality of the individual is never developed beyond his environment - he never becomes a being in his own right. In this sense, character remains subordinate to circumstance in Jefferies' work - and yet this deterministic approach can occasionally produce a tightly-knit short story that contains an unexpected note of pathos and resignation.³¹

The characters in the novels of Thomas Hardy, on the other hand, form the core of his vision. Certainly, it may be claimed that they too are variously governed by circumstance - (Hardy has not infrequently been branded a determinist) - but here the circumstance is generated from

within; it is not the final link of a chain that begins with international politics and trade, but rather the unavoidable consequence of human interaction on a very personal level.

Indeed, it was through this desire to investigate the wellsprings of human behaviour that Hardy discovered the agonizing dilemma of his own beliefs; the impossibility of going back, and the equal undesirability of going forward. As Irving Howe puts it:

"To be forced, through the pain of integrity, to surrender a faith by which childhood had been warmed and moral sentiments forged, could constitute a terrible drama of the soul. For Hardy. . . it. . . persisted through the years, acting itself out on the sunken stage of his consciousness, with delayed actions and reverberations, and never quite allowing him to resolve emotionally what he had resolved in his mind".³²

It would seem that Hardy became increasingly aware, throughout the composition of the Wessex novels, that the conflict came from outside the rural world, in the shape of urban intrusion - which surely suggests that the former was relying upon its traditional strength for present survival. By contrast, the industrial town offered ample proof that where there was conflict (in the shape of capitalistic enterprise), there was vitality, the potential for change and assimilation, with the final outcome of progress and prosperity. To avoid such conflict is not necessarily to endure, for by its very nature, progress will render obsolete and sterile what formerly possessed value and energy. This simple fact that the countryside and the country-people are static is

what finally destroys the vision of the Wessex novels. Jude the Obscure is the admission of a defeat that was implicit in such an early idyllic work as Under the Greenwood Tree. Left alone, the rural environment can sink quietly into its unheeding lethargy, undisturbed by any extraneous pressure. But there is extraneous pressure, in the aggressive urban consciousness, which would assimilate to itself the meaning and significance of the rural being. Urban characters apply a different psychological viewpoint to the world of nature - essentially, it is an alienated detachment which would apply the utilitarian principles of self help, of making use of the countryside for their own purposes, their own advancement; they come to the country to conquer it, to adapt it to their needs - there is no sense of belonging, no sense of relationship or of harmony. One consequence of this lack is pointed out by Philip Landon:

"A vital link between man and the cosmos was the gradual being eroded by the impact of modern industry. Moreover, the restless press of modern thought awakened, within individuals, desires and visions which made men and women unable to accept the ancient traditions; only the two-dimensional peasants find any continuing satisfaction in the agrarian life. . . ." 33

We must remember that the industrial town was still a new and sinister phenomenon, the unplanned result of a certain combination of events and developments, with no established patterns and traditions that provide a satisfactory mould for unity of spirit, an accepted rationale for living; the important motives behind the initial growth of

such towns were greed, ambition and relentless, driving energy. We must also remember that the urban community was only established through migratory upheaval - they were peopled by those who uprooted themselves from another way of life to begin afresh.³⁴ Many critics choose to describe them as 'deracine', and it is this sense of being torn up by the roots that Hardy emphasises, both for their own motivation, and for the contrast they provide with the rural folk amongst whom they live. For it is this same 'uprootedness' which allows these urban intruders to assert themselves over the country people; they have a detachment that permits them a perspective for their actions - each move being assessed in its position relative to other moves that make up the chain of cause and effect. Country people, on the other hand, do not possess this mental 'over-view', they are still an integral part of their environment, and respond unthinkingly to its demands. Yet we must bear in mind that we are encountering the urban character only in relation to the rural consciousness; Hardy is concerned to define the psychological differences between rural and urban man, and therefore gives little consideration (at least until Jude the Obscure) to the innumerable social and personal ills that surround urban man within his own environment. Overcrowding, lack of sanitation, of water, and of air - these were also products of urban man's rational awareness.³⁵

The contrast between urban and rural brings us back to our consideration of the two levels of perception in Hardy's writing, for now we may perceive, in the two ways of life, rural and urban, a profound

symbolic function.³⁶ They represent conflicting life-forces, the one spontaneous, primitive, the 'natural', or 'intuitive' life; the other detached, premeditated, the 'rational' life of alienated man. It is with Hardy's own inescapable disillusionment in the face of these two conflicting forces that we are concerned in this paper. As we have seen, it is an indecision that stems from a tension between rationality and intuition in his own being; emotionally, he is clearly drawn to the 'natural' life, yet his reason tells him that society will never permit any such answer - and he is therefore submitting to an illusion by even contemplating it. Yet having rejected the 'natural' life, Hardy finds the world of rational possibilities unacceptable also, for, in his interpretation at least, it is a world of blindness and shortcomings - where reason is, in fact, inadequate. This is the conflict that generates much of the passion in the Wessex novels.

"How do you know but ev'ry bird that
Cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight clos'd by
your senses five?"³⁷

FOOTNOTES

1. William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", Complete Writings (Geoffrey Keynes, ed.), (London, 1966) p. 149

All references to Blake's poetry are taken from this edition.

2. Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (London, 1965), p. 120.

All references to Hardy's novels are taken from the Macmillan 'Papermac' edition.

3. Blake, "Heaven and Hell", p. 154.

4. Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York, 1967), p. 6. (My italics.)

I assume that Fromm, in talking about "developing" reason, is implying an expansion of consciousness (Through drugs, perhaps?) to overcome the barrier between the agent of separateness, (reason), and the agent of unity (love).

5. Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel. Vol. 11 (London, 1963) p. 49.

6. William Petersen, "The Ideological Origins of Britain's New Towns" Journal of the American Institute of Planners (May, 1968), p. 162.

7. V. H. Collins, Talks with Thomas Hardy (London, 1928), p. 66.

8. Blake, "There is No Natural Religion", p. 97.

9. Blake, "Heaven and Hell", p. 153.

10. Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London, 1964), p. 334.

11. Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders* (London, 1964), p. 56.
12. Philip J. Landon, in his unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation "Themes of Conversion and Compromise in the Fiction of Thomas Hardy", (University of Maryland, 1968), states:

 "While [Hardy] could see the spiritual dead end of rationalism, material progress, and traditional religion, he found no new spiritual affirmation to replace his loss, and his conversion was blocked. Consequently, Hardy was unable to accept the promise of a Victorian world-view based on the possibility of conversion and compromise". (p. 87)

 This is the crux of Hardy's dilemma; the only positive values that he could discover were those of rural traditionalism (which was dying of sterility), and of human spirituality, which, in the shape of Sue Bridehead, revealed itself as a pretence and an escape, not a progression.
13. Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London, 1963), p. 145.
14. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, p. 444.
15. Blake, "Heaven and Hell", p. 155.
16. Arnold Kettle, *Hardy the Novelist - A Reconsideration* (W. D. Thomas Memorial Lecture, Swansea, 1966), p. 6.
17. Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (London, 1964), p. 285.
18. Blake, "Annotations to Swedenberg's "The Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom", p. 90.
19. We may consider the early descriptions of Egdon Heath, in *The Return of the Native*, or that of the alien threshing machine in *Tess*, as two random examples of scenes that suggest a complete harmony of perception.
20. Blake, "There is No Natural Religion", p. 97.
21. Blake puts the same argument in much clearer terms in the work cited above.
22. Blake, "All Religions are One", p. 98.
23. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, pp. 73-5.

24. I am aware that the intuitive ability of the reader is also relevant in the process of verbal communication; it is perhaps this faculty in us that makes the initial (and often most valid) judgment upon such a passage as we have been discussing. This is not to say, however, that our intuition is infallible, because neither are our senses.

25. Hardy, The Return of the Native, pp.73-4.

26. Petersen, op. cit., p. 166

Despite some looseness of terminology - I am doubtful of the usefulness of such words as 'Romantics' and 'sentiment' - Petersen makes the important connection between the original philosophical conception of rationality and its changing social implications (One may speculate, in passing, upon the possible value of a study of Hardy as a Romantic).

27. Graham Hough, The Last Romantics(London, 1947), p. 119.

28. Richard D. Altick, "The Social Background to the Growth of a Mass Reading Public" in Backgrounds to Victorian Literature (San Francisco, 1967), p. 217.

29. Richard Jefferies, Hodge and his Masters (London, 1949), "Going Downhill", p. 48.

30. See C. Henry Warren, Introduction to Hodge, p. ix.

31. For example, the story 'Going Downhill', which describes the gradual but irresistible decline in the fortunes of an ordinary farmer. We know little more about him as an individual at the end than we did at the beginning; and yet we have an awareness of the reality of his existence that transcends anything factual description alone could give us.

32. Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1967), p. 12.

33. Philip J. Landon, op. cit., p. 117.

34. Richard D. Altick, op. cit., quotes from New Trends in English Education in the Eighteenth Century (Nicholas Haus, 1951).

"The sons of farmers and agricultural labourers who congregated in newly created slums were natives of all four corners of England and Wales. They were foreign to each other, they even spoke different dialects, and they were completely lost

in that flotsam and jetsam. The new rows of tenements had no parish church, no local vicar with his school, no cultural background or local tradition. In their native villages they were human personalities, although subordinate; here they became ciphers, an economic commodity which was bought and sold according to the market price of labour" (p. 219).

35. J. L. and Barbara Hammond, in their book The Bleak Age (Harmondsworth, 1947) paint a very grim picture of the hardship and misery that was typical of urban life. The chapter entitled "The State of the Towns" is particularly relevant in this respect.
36. This tends to contradict A. J. Guerard's claim, in his Introduction to Hardy-Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1963), that ". . . Hardy was a . . . simple, even primitive novelist, and one who left little to be explicated in the way of elusive symbolic content or technical subtlety. . . ." (p. 6.)
37. Blake, "Heaven and Hell" p. 150.

CHAPTER II

'THE COUNTRYSIDE IN ASCENDANT'

i) Under the Greenwood Tree

Under the Greenwood Tree (1872) is generally afforded scant attention by Hardy critics, largely because its lyrical simplicity provides little material for the exercise of any critical theory. Nevertheless, it occupies a position of some significance as far as the novels are concerned, being the first work in which Hardy began to unfold the Wessex scene; for that reason it is worthy of our interest. Indeed, the clarity of its thematic structure offers a valuable insight into the basic framework that prevails, under various guises, throughout all the later, more complex Wessex novels.

In Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy was experimenting with the pastoral theme; he had been advised to develop this aspect of his writing, and this novel was the first serious attempt to put such counsel into practise. Although he was now writing from a fund of personal experience (in contrast to the intellectual exercise of The Poor Man and the Lady¹), we may speculate that it was not until he had imposed the

discipline of the written word upon his experience, that he was able to define satisfactorily his own attitude toward the people and situations he was describing. Thus we may occasionally detect a thread of artificiality in the texture of the work, as if Hardy's adaptation of his subject-matter has failed to conceal the traditional elements around which the book is constructed. Even at this embryonic stage, a tension begins to reveal itself, in the division between theory and practise - between the stylised, literary concept of the country as Arcadia, and the essential acuteness of Hardy's own observation of nineteenth-century rural life. There are moments when we feel that the balance between the ideal and the real is somewhat uncertain; having made the unavoidable admission that conflict exists, Hardy is unable to resolve the dilemma by committing himself to either side. It is ironic that this light-hearted tale, that ventures so close to idyllic charm and warmth, should conceal an impasse that Hardy would never succeed in overcoming.

Hardy states in the Preface of 1896 that Under the Greenwood Tree ". . . is intended to be a fairly true picture, at first hand, of the personages, ways and customs which were common among such orchestral bodies [as the Mellstock Quire] in the villages of fifty or sixty years ago."²

Two significantly juxtaposed forces are implicit in this passage; first, a desire to convey an essentially realistic picture of a previous way of life, and secondly, a strong undercurrent of nostalgic feeling (the Preface continues: "One is inclined to regret the displacement of

these ecclesiastical bandsmen by an isolated organist. . .") which by its very presence tends to inhibit the sense of inevitability that is integral in any depiction of reality. It is the nostalgia in Hardy's writing that generates its peculiar quality of timelessness, that makes of the Mellstock Quire an institution so venerable and immutable that its speedy dissolution by the new vicar shakes the whole village community to its foundations. This is the first real encounter between the two worlds, and the inequality of the contest is communicated with startling effect, as we watch the youthful inexperience of a newcomer overwhelm with ease the age-old customs of a whole community. In the new order, traditions must prove their usefulness to remain, otherwise they must fly like dust before the gusting winds of change.

Thus Hardy begins by allowing self-indulgent feelings of nostalgia (emphasized in the 1896 Preface) to dictate an idyllic setting and mood, which undeniably enriches the early chapters with some memorable descriptions of character and scene, as we are introduced to the Quire and their activities. At this point we might almost believe ourselves transported to a time when the world was still young, surrounded by the shepherds and craftsmen of some Golden Age. Indeed, the description of the cheerful gathering at the home of tranter Dewy (for the express purpose of broaching a cask of cider) is a sustained echo of some ancient idyll,³ which amply demonstrates the power of Hardy's imaginative sympathy for a different way of life. Suffice to repeat the portrait given us of grandfather William:

"William Dewy - otherwise grandfather William - was now about seventy; yet an ardent vitality still preserved a warm and roughened bloom upon his face, which reminded gardeners of the sunny side of a ripe ribstone-pippin; though a narrow strip of forehead, that was protected from the weather by lying above the line of his hat-brim, seemed to belong to some town-man, so gentlemanly was its whiteness. His was a humorous and kindly nature, not unmixed with a frequent melancholy; and he had a firm religious faith. But to his neighbours he had no character in particular. . . ." ³ (p. 22)

There is a passing temptation to visualize old William Dewy in a white flowing robe, standing by a sacrificial stone.

We may conjecture that Hardy soon came to recognize the facile impotence of this rather sentimental approach, for to concentrate upon one aspect in this way was an intrinsic denial of its reality. Hardy's inborn admiration for the rural way of life was far too profound to turn it into a pastoral romance; in that case, the countryside and its inhabitants would become no more than the instruments of escape - the means to an inconsequential end. Thus the untroubled existence of the Mellstock Quire must inevitably be cut short, as the harsh actualities of the outside world must intrude upon a daydream.

Here is the crux of the matter; the newcomers play by a different set of rules that effectively create a different reality. Suddenly, there is resistance to what has hitherto been unquestioningly accepted - and the disturbing fact is revealed that ancient custom has little inner resource to resist the challenge. The contrast in attitude between the

'outsiders', such as Farmer Shiner and Parson Maybold, and the Mellstock villagers, is fundamental; indeed, it lies at the heart of all the Wessex novels. It is the difference between involvement and detachment; as suggested above, the villagers display a total acceptance of their established way of life - like their ballads, it has been handed down virtually intact from generation to generation - and from this one characteristic of the rural psyche stems the whole illusion of traditional strength and vitality. Custom prevails not through any inner energy, but through a lack of challenge - it is its own justification. Not surprisingly, rural people exhibit a strong sense of inevitability, which gives a pungent flavour of resignation to their outlook on life. It goes far to explain the "slightly cynical nature" of tranter Dewy, who appears the most perceptive of the rustic characters.

Rural involvement signifies meeting life upon equal terms; because rural man is part of a greater whole, he has no notion of gaining an upper hand, of attempting to manipulate people and events to improve his own position. Yet this absence of any egocentric motivation may become a disadvantage; in following a pre-determined role, rural man can have no conception of the psychological versatility of his urban counterpart, the manifestation of an alienated awareness. Rural man has a cocoon-like security within nature; it is only when the urban intruder breaks open this protection that the illusion stands revealed.

If we hark back to the early chapters with this point in mind, the Quire's merry-making may now sound the occasional hollow note,

hints of impending change, dimly perceived, that have reached to the core of their existence;

" 'Times have changed from the times they used to be,' said Mail, regarding nobody can tell what interesting old panoramas with an inward eye, and letting his outward glance rest on the ground because it was as convenient a position as any. 'People don't care much about us now! I've been thinking we must be almost the last left in the county of the old string players? Barrel-organs, and the things next door to 'em that you blow wi' your foot, have come in terribly of late years.' " (p. 3.)

The loss of a custom, therefore, becomes something more than a slight change in day-to-day routine; it is no less than a death-blow, for it makes expendable what was formerly a solid support of life. The sense of life's relativity is very powerful here, as we watch the validity of a way of living disappear into nothing before the incursion of a stronger. Ironically, the same sense of inevitability ensures the Quire's submission to the change that will deprive them of their role. Again, tranter Dewy is their stoical spokesman:

" 'Well then, Mr. Mayble, since death's to be, we'll die like men any day you name. . . I suppose mortal men mustn't expect their own way entirely; and I express in all our names that we'll make shift and be satisfied with what you say.' The tranter touched the brim of his imaginary hat again and all the choir did the same. 'About Michaelmas then, as far as you are concerned, sir, and then we make room for the next generation. . .'" (pp. 88, 93)

This, then, is the price of involvement, of living in simple accord with the natural environment; the villagers are, in a sense, incapable of adapting themselves to circumstances, largely because they are too much a part of those circumstances. Their response to the phenomena around them derives far more from instinct than from intellect - which naturally limits their ability to adapt to any new perspectives. On the other hand, this reliance upon the conformity of human experience produces a folk-wisdom that evinces a sympathy beyond the professional zeal of the young vicar; it has the weight of feeling rather than thought behind it, and derives from a unified apprehension of life. We may point to various debates amongst members of the Quire, or the advice offered by the tranter to his son on the subject of women.

Albert Guerard puts the matter clearly enough:

"The true Hardy rustic is of personality all compact: of gestures, turns of phrase, humors and deformity. He has a past history, which he delights to relate, but no present history and conflict. For he is immune to suffering and change; he is part of the landscape, and his stability is a fixed screen for the rebellious and changeful protagonists." ⁴

In contrast to the villagers, those who do not belong to this community are characterized by a detachment that provokes an entirely different reaction in them to time-honoured village traditions. Because they feel no sense of loyalty to one particular code, they can exercise a freedom of behaviour that puts the local people to a manifest disadvantage. It is useful to view these 'intruders' as coming from an urban (as opposed

to a rural) environment, although the division goes far beyond the fact of birth in a town house instead of a country cottage. The key lies in the nature of this detachment, what it results from, and how it relates to the involvement of the Mellstock villagers.

The point was made above (p. 19) that one outcome of the Industrial Revolution was a new kind of urban development, accomplished with much haste and little forethought. A considerable body of people was required to live and work in these new circumstances - people who clearly had little sense of 'belonging' to their environment. From such uprootedness comes alienation, which manifests itself in a new dimension of awareness, since the individual is no longer an integrated part of the world in which he lives. Thus alienated man is, to some extent, provided with the mental equipment to control this greater independence - and here the contrast becomes more apparent. The point is, that the 'rational' man is able to manipulate his environment for his own purposes; because he is separate from it, he can use it selfishly, as the instrument of his temporary whim. The distinction between the two opposed psychological attitudes is clearly demonstrated in the confrontation between Dick Dewy and Farmer Shiner, at the tranter's Christmas party. The latter has disregarded the rules of the dance, in order to retain the attractive Fancy Day as his partner.

"' Mr. Shiner, you didn't cast off' said Dick, for want of something else to demolish him with; casting off himself, and being put out at the farmer's irregularity.

'Perhaps I shan't cast off for any man,'
said Mr. Shiner.

'I think you ought to, Sir.'"
Subsequently, Dick expands his opinion.

" ' . . . 'tis in the dance; and a man has hardly
any right to hack and mangle what was
ordained by the regular dance-maker, who,
I daresay, got his living by making 'em,
and thought of nothing else all his life.'

'I don't like casting off; then very well,
I cast off for no dance-maker that ever
lived. . . !'" (p. 56).

His reluctance to cause a scene apart, Dick is at a loss for a way of dealing with the situation; his automatic respect for the wishes of the 'dance-maker' places him in a weaker logical position. The difference is, that as an essentially urban character, Shiner has no sense of inevitability. His rational awareness allows him the choice of either casting off or not casting off - a decision that is not psychologically open to Dick. Clearly, the exercise of this existential choice can result in a bellicose insensitivity from a source unknown to the rural community, for it stems from a fundamental human separation. Shiner is responsible only to himself, and therefore can defy dance-makers with impunity.

Much more subtle than the assertiveness of Farmer Shiner, however, is the frank reasonableness of Parson Maybold. Hardy slyly shows us this distinction between the two men in their contrasting reactions to the nocturnal carol-singing of the Quire; Shiner responds to the traditional disturbance by uttering " . . . enough invective to consign the

whole parish to perdition. . . " (p. 37), whilst the parson is more than tolerant - without actually going to the length of getting out of bed.

Yet it is Parson Maybold who represents most fully the rational approach to living - who introduces into the village (with every good intention) the forces that will ultimately transform it. The dominance of the new order is reflected in the influential position he occupies, despite his lack of experience. Thus his spiritual allegiance is not to the village, but to the external authority which commands his services.

It is interesting to compare, through the eyes of the villagers, the vigorous enthusiasm of the newcomer with the resignation of the previous incumbent, who had apparently recognized the manifest impossibility of his task.

" ' Ah, Mr. Grinham was the man!' said Bowman. 'Why, he never troubled us wi' a visit from year's end to year's end. You might go anywhere, do anything; you'd be sure never to see him. . . There's good in a man's not putting a parish to unnecessary trouble.' "

On the other hand,

"' . . . there's this here man never letting us have a bit o'peace; but keeping on about being good and upright till 'tis carried to such a pitch as I never see the like afore nor since.!' " (p. 75, 6)

Criticism is tempered with praise, through the intervention of the two elder Dewys, who perceive a genuine sincerity in the parson's

activities. Indeed, behind the magnanimity of William Dewey's remark is a profound awareness of the whole situation; it is here we realize that we are faced with two alternatives where choice is irrelevant.

" 'Nobody will feel the loss of our church-work so much as I,' said the old man firmly; 'that you d'all know. I've a-been in the quire man and boy ever since I was a child of eleven. But for all that 'tisn't in me to call the man a bad man, because I truly and sincerely believe 'im to be a good young feller.' " (p. 76)

The central issue between vicar and Quire is, of course, the introduction of the organ. There is little difficulty in regarding the organ as 'the symbol of an invasion that will sweep away the age-old pattern'⁵ - a mechanical product that manufactures music, instead of creating it. To the parson's way of thinking, it is simply a more efficient, practical means of providing musical accompaniment; he cannot appreciate its significance for the church-musicians. Prevented by his essentially intellectual outlook from understanding the motives behind other points of view, Maybold does not perceive what Hardy points out in his Preface, that ". . . the change [i. e. in accompaniment] has tended to stultify the professed aims of the clergy, its direct result being to curtail and extinguish the interest of parishioners in church doings." (p. v.)

There is another aspect to the institution of the church-organ, which brings out a psychological similarity in Shiner and Maybold. The former is also a strong advocate of musical innovation - and yet both men

have another motive than mere improvement in the name of Progress. In a sense, they are using the organ as a means to a different end - that of winning favour in the eyes of Fancy Day, to whom would fall the position of organist. It is a case of adapting circumstances to personal benefit, which, as we have seen, encourages an insensitivity to the feelings of other human beings. Indeed, the parson's own ingenuousness becomes very apparent in his handling of the interview with tranter Dewy: he is embarrassed to admit his own role in the proposed change.

"Understand me rightly, ' he said
 'the churchwarden [Shiner] proposed
 it to me, but I had thought myself of
 getting - Miss Day to play. '" (p. 87)

Fancy Day plays a significant role in Under the Greenwood Tree - in fact, she is the precursor of three other Wessex heroines who possess a similar blend of attractions and foibles.⁶ Her importance stems from the fact that she cannot be categorized as being an exclusive product of either the rural or the urban way of life. Born in the country, she has nevertheless had the advantage of an urban education, trained to develop the intellectual capacity in others. Indeed, her social advance has considerably influenced her father, who is very much aware of the possibilities that have opened up to his daughter:

"'. . . d'ye think Fancy picked up her good manners, the smooth turn of her tongue, her musical notes, and her knowledge of books, in a homely hole like this? . . .'

' . . . if any gentleman, who sees her to be his equal in polish, should want to marry her, and she want to marry him, he shan't be superior to her in pocket. Now do ye think after this that you be good enough for her?'

'No'.

'Then good-night to'ee, Master Dewy.' " (pp. 159-60)

There can be little doubt that in Geoffrey Day's mind, Fancy's advance lies within the urban context. Here again we see a similar replacement of human values by more materialistic consideration; in his own concern for finding Fancy an 'equal in polish', her father is denying the uniqueness of Fancy's feelings as a separate individual. Thus he is content to entertain Farmer Shiner, and reject Dick Dewy - which is the opposite to his daughter's wishes.

Through the exercise of some feminine guile, however, Fancy is permitted to make the final decision, not between Dick Dewy and Shiner, who ". . . as a richer man, had shown too much assurance in asking the favour. . . ." (p. 53) , but between Dick and Parson Maybold. Her choice is significant, since she embodies this cultural balance between two worlds, and, by contrast, the two candidates for her love are what might be termed 'total representatives' of these two ways of life.

We may turn aside briefly to note the different paths of courtship taken by the two suitors, since they further reflect the difference of their psychological make-up.

Because Dick is totally the man of feeling, his captivation is immediate and complete; he is literally enthralled by his first glimpse of the young school-teacher. From that moment he senses an intuitive bond with her; when they are both in church,

" . . . Dick began to breathe more freely the warm new air she had brought with her; to feel rushings of blood, and to have impressions that there was a tie between her and himself visible to all the congregation. . . " (p. 45)

Dick's response to Fancy penetrates every fibre of his body; Hardy remarks that he subsequently recalled the service through ". . . all the ideas. . . that creep into the mind when reason is only exercising its lowest activity through the eye." (p. 46). In this sense, Dick's whole being is receptive, rather than his mind alone. Falling in love becomes a total experience, which in Dick stimulates behaviour that we, trapped by our own mental awareness, might term ingenuousness or naivety.

Hardy then shows us the reactions of Parson Maybold upon the same occasion - and the difference is interesting. We are told that the latter had ". . . the same instinctive perception of an interesting presence. . . though his emotion reached a far less developed stage." Maybold simply does not have Dick's capacity for feeling, although his detachment does not prevent a basic sexual response to Fancy.⁷ "And there was this difference, too, that the person in question was surprised

at his condition, and sedulously endeavoured to reduce himself to his normal state of mind." (p. 46) Here is the crux; the person is able to stand back and look at himself; he can conceptualize his position, and conclude that he does not 'know' himself (hence his surprise). For him, sexual attraction is 'a state of mind', which can be analyzed and then acted upon. Fancy remains a separate entity, toward whom the vicar can adopt a conscious mental attitude.

'Know thyself' is a dictum that is quite irrelevant for Dick, for he is himself; there is no split in his personality between body and spirit, between what he does and what he thinks. In a sense, he thinks actively, stimulus and response become combined in what we have termed 'feeling.' But Dick's complete involvement in 'feeling' can also work against him, for it denies any possibility of strategy in attracting Fancy's affections. From the beginning, he is an open book, unconsciously relying upon the sincerity and warmth of his own sentiments to influence those of Fancy. He exudes the rural virtues of simplicity and candour, sometimes too thoroughly for his own good; he is never so attractive to Fancy as when she thinks she has lost him, having perversely stretched his compliance beyond breaking point-for only then does she appreciate her own feelings for him.

Parson Maybold, on the other hand, is much more circumspect in his approach; indeed, the first indication he gives to Fancy of his feelings is in the shape of a proposal of marriage. His appeal is

consciously directed toward the more sophisticated side of her nature, for he is far more aware than Dick of the workings of a woman's mind. Here is the powerful temptation of one 'equal in polish', who can offer her all those things that her urban contact has taught her to value :

" ' . . . you shall have anything, Fancy, anything to make you happy - pony-carriage, flowers, birds, pleasant society. Yes, you have enough in you for any society, after a few months of travel with me! . . . ' " (p. 178)

Ironically, it is the parson's innate honesty that reveals the element of calculation in his behaviour; thought has constantly dictated deed, so that there has been a rationale behind his actions that contrasts vividly with Dick's fresh spontaneity. He willingly admits that his feeling has been subjected to rational analysis.

" ' O Fancy, I have watched you, criticized you even severely, brought my feelings to the light of judgment, and still have found them rational, and such as any man might have expected to be inspired with by a woman like you! ' "

- and his reason has finally declared her fit .

"I see your great charm; I respect your natural talents, and the refinement they have brought into your nature - they are quite enough, and more than enough for me! ' " (p. 178)

We may perceive the unsteady balance of Fancy's divided loyalties in her temporary submission to the vicar's startlingly passionate

plea.

But what of Fancy herself? The significance of her role aside, what is her nature, as a woman? The fact is, that her character contains many of the qualities that are typical of Hardy women - she is capricious, even wilful; she has a tendency to be vain and thoughtless and irresponsible - to be, in fact, aggravatingly feminine. As a personality, she remains relatively undeveloped. She is the receiver of attention, rather than the giver, so that the spotlight is rarely directed on her alone. For this reason, many of her appearances can be summed up by simple reference to one or more of the qualities mentioned above; her only positive act is her decision to reject the vicar's offer of marriage, when she is forced to confront the reality of 'ambition and vanity' in her own self. Yet when she has made her choice, we may still find it difficult to accept, despite it being the 'right' choice. In belonging to both worlds, she belongs to neither; the price of having such an option is that neither alternative can be the right one.

Thus although the conclusion is a happy one, the inconsistencies are sufficient to cast a shadow, as the last words of the novel imply

" 'O, 'tis the nightingale, murmured she,
and thought of a secret she would never
tell.' " (p. 204)

As George Wing points out:

'This dyspeptic conclusion to a pastoral
love idyll, the slight human ugliness of
deceit jarring the song of the nightingale,

the hinted feminine hypocrisy and capacity for betrayal staining Dick's supreme and innocent serenity; these premature moral irritants 'lift the novel away from any danger of smugness or complacency about human affairs.'⁸

The rural world has re-established itself, but not without paying a price, for although Hardy's nostalgia finally wins through, his integrity as a historian ('a fairly true picture') compels him to qualify the victory. Here is a fundamental uncertainty that prevails throughout the Wessex novels - a tension that arises out of Hardy's two opposed visions of the countryside as pastoral idyll and as impotent anachronism. As we shall see, all of the later novels close on this note of doubtful ambiguity - and it is my contention that it derives directly from this painful dichotomy in Hardy's mind, between what he knows, intellectually, and what he feels, intuitively. We may suspect that, as far as Under the Greenwood Tree is concerned, Hardy himself was aware of the lameness of its conclusion, yet could do nothing without abandoning the values that he believed an implicit part of rural life. We may go so far as to suggest that only in the course of writing this book did Hardy realize the strength of the urban invasion, and the subsequent problems in retaining his ideal.

FOOTNOTES

1. Florence Emily Hardy, in her biography of her husband, quotes John Morley as saying that some scenes from The Poor Man and the Lady (1868) " . . . read like some clever lad's dream. " "

Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1962), p. 59.
2. Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London, 1966), p. v.
3. Edmund Gosse's 'spirit of Plastic Beauty' states of the infant Hardy: ". . . he shall speak of richly-coloured pastoral places in the accent of Theocritus. . . "

Cosmopolis, an International Review, (Jan, 1896), quoted by Edmund Blunden, Thomas Hardy, (London, 1967), p. 88.
4. Albert Guerard, Hardy the Novelist (Cambridge, 1949), p. 122.
5. J. F. Danby, Under the Greenwood Tree, Critical Quarterly, Vol. 1, (1959), p. 12.
6. Bathsheba Everdene, in Far From the Madding Crowd (1874), Grace Melbury, in The Woodlanders (1887), and Tess Durbeyfield, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891).
7. One may recall at this point a similar contrast between Tom Jones and Blifil in Fielding's Tom Jones (1749). Obviously, the characterization is more extreme, and Parson Maybold certainly does not share any of Blifil's insidious villainy, but there are some interesting parallels.
8. George Wing, Thomas Hardy (London, 1963), p. 44.

ii) Far from the Madding Crowd

In the 1912 Preface to Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy

remarks that

" . . . the realities out of which it was spun were material for another kind of study of this little group of church musicians than is found in the chapters here penned so lightly, even so farcically and flippantly at times." ¹

Although these words were written with forty years of retrospect, it would appear from subsequent works that Hardy was quick to perceive themes of darker significance in the fabric of this first Wessex novel; although he had set himself to write a pleasant and light-hearted tale of pastoral life, we may suspect that he soon found in his way some unexpected obstacles, whose presence disrupted the even tenour of the work. For this reason, they had to be effectively ignored - and yet the knowledge of their existence inevitably cast a shadow over the prevalent brightness. Thus we may tentatively account for Hardy's somewhat harsh verdict of his work as at times 'farcical and flippant', he is interpreting his inexperience as irresponsibility, in presenting as 'a fairly true picture' an image that he now sees as partial and incomplete. Hindsight perhaps obscured from Hardy the exploratory nature of Under the Greenwood Tree; he was forced to make assumptions in this work that he later rejected as invalid - which, as Danby points out, initiated the retreat from the ideal:

"... in 1912 Hardy realised even more clearly than in 1872 that the possibilities of such a comic resolution of the human plight, the transformation of private pains into public habits of wisdom, were gone for good. The comic resolution required the assumption that the village of Mellstock Quire would always be there. And already it was vanishing. Under the Greenwood Tree dramatises the first shocks to its structure. . ."²

In many ways, the next Wessex novel Hardy produced, Far From the Madding Crowd (1874) exhibits the "... deeper, more essential, more transcendent handling. . ."¹ to which Hardy aspired; yet we may perceive within it a considerable debt of experience to his previous work, for the framework is manifestly similar (the difference being that the 'little group of church musicians' have now become an equally cohesive group of rustic work-folk). After the experimental simplicity of the first Wessex novel, Far From the Madding Crowd represents an abundant release of Hardy's creative powers, for now he has some assurance in what he is doing; having determined the 'realities' of his picture, he can concentrate upon the nuances of colour and detail, to produce a work of richer texture and deeper significance.

This novel may be regarded both as fulfilment and conclusion of the pastoral eulogy begun in Under the Greenwood Tree. In the later Wessex novels, the idyllic setting loses its predominance, giving way to more austere landscapes as Hardy develops the idea of a psychological inter-relationship between man and his environment. We have already seen how human discord can jar the serenity of rural existence in

Mellstock, and we encounter a more serious upheaval amongst the people of Weatherbury; there is clearly a vulnerability that belies the surface tranquility of these communities. Thus to create a harmonious and picturesque scene is to create an illusion - for if nature is perceived essentially through the human presence, then it must reflect the inner mood of that presence, and not the impartial observations of the omniscient author. As Richard C. Carpenter puts it:

"Hardy's landscapes are, in a way, hermetic: they show us the visible world as a portrait of the invisible, the world of inner states of being. Wessex is firmly based on observed actuality, but the structure of meaning rises far above the base. . . ." ³

Far From the Madding Crowd concludes the depiction of Nature for Nature's sake; as the natural world becomes the symbolic manifestation of human states of mind, it must inevitably lose its bucolic charm before Hardy's increasingly pessimistic view of human progress. But the relativity of perception is not limited to landscape alone, for from the beginning, Hardy has shown himself aware of the perpetual flux within the human context also ⁴ - an insight that plays an important part in Far From the Madding Crowd, in the inability (or unwillingness) of several characters to recognize the partiality of their own perception. Indeed, much of the tragedy arises from an easy acceptance of incomplete or distorted evidence as the whole truth; irrevocable action is taken merely to indulge a flattered ego. In Under the Greenwood Tree, the

heroine is made to retreat from an impulsive acceptance of a marriage proposal - for no better reason, one suspects, than to maintain the comic mood. Now Hardy is prepared to confront the role of impulse as a positive factor, not only in his heroine, but in a character whose whole 'raison d'etre' is to exploit to the full every passing whim, whatever the consequences.

Little can be said about the rustic community in this work that does not repeat the previous section; although they are more individualized than their predecessors of the Quire, they perform essentially the same function of providing a static background that contrasts with the manoeuverings of those characters who, in varying degrees, detach themselves from the rural environment. The farm-people are the environment, the human products of a life that has remained as constant as the seasons; and therefore they evince a security that comes from this total sense of 'belonging', both in time and space. The rustics share the immutability of their surroundings; there is the same feeling of timelessness in the gatherings at Warren's Malthouse as in those at the home of tranter Dewy - the same rich mixture of humour and reminiscence, profundity and anecdote, which occasionally attains an acuteness that brought charges of idealization from contemporary critics.⁵

Yet this stronghold also has been reached by intimations of change, although again their significance is not understood.

" ' And how was the old place at
Norcombe, when ye went for your dog?
I should like to see the old familiar spot;
but faith, I shouldn't know a soul there
now'

'I suppose you wouldn't. 'Tis altered
very much' " (p. 95)

The implication is that this way of life is crumbling from within; reference to the past reveals evidence that directly contradicts the 'sense of functional continuity' exemplified in the great barn, and in the sheep-shearing episode as a whole. In fact, the scene amply demonstrates the equivocal basis of rural life; in the evocation of idyllic charm and vitality, the setting assumes an anachronistic isolation from the rest of the work. It involves a wholly different concept of time, as Hardy explains:

"In comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable. The citizen's 'Then' is the rustic's 'Now'. . . In these Wessex nooks the busy outsider's ancient times are only old; his old times are still new; his present is futurity." (p. 130)

The Weatherbury community has acquired its solidity simply through standing still; its wisdom and security have grown from generations of similar lives, shaped according to one traditional pattern, in a process as natural and unending as the earth itself. Amongst these people also we find the sense of inevitability that produces a philosophical equanimity toward the rough edges of life:

" ' Nobody can hurt a dead woman', at length said Coggan, . . . 'All that could be done for her is done - she's beyond us: and why should man put himself in a tearing hurry for lifeless clay that can neither feel nor see, and don't know what you do with her at all? . . . Drink, Shepherd, and be friends, for tomorrow we may be like her. . . ' " (pp. 259-60)

Abstract time has no meaning for the rustics, who expend their lives in instinctive response to familiar circumstance, like dancers moving in a ritual of ingrained habit and tradition. Once again, we are allowed to perceive a reality that seems almost ideal, another age of primal innocence; but all too soon, the fragility of the vision becomes manifest, as reality is transformed into illusion by the intrusion of a new dimension of awareness; the rustics have, by their very nature, no means of conceiving what is happening to them, and therefore can be exploited with impunity, reduced to helpless confusion with no possibility of resistance. Thus the source of strength becomes the source of weakness; it is precisely because ". . . the barn was natural to the shearers, and the shearers were in harmony with the barn. . ." (p. 130) that they must submit to the machinations of a 'rational' man.

Under the Greenwood Tree stumbles because the characters are at times unable to meet the implications of their roles; in confronting the issues more realistically, Hardy realised that the rural virtues could not be presented in such straightforward terms as in Dick Dewy, whose final happiness is due not to his personal resilience, but to the somewhat inconsistent integrity and compassion of the other characters involved.

The point is, that Dick is too much a representative of the rural community, sharing too completely their unthinking involvement with one restricted approach to life. His role is passive; rarely do we feel that Dick has any control over the course of events. On the contrary, he can only demonstrate the static impracticability of rural innocence when faced with the independence of more sophisticated natures.

We may be sure that Hardy recognized these inadequacies in his first rural hero, and was concerned to make his successor more equal to his part; yet, ironically, the only way in which he could achieve this 'reinforcement' of character was by infusing him with a measure of the sophistication that exemplified his 'urban' representatives⁶. Thus Gabriel Oak possesses a library, about which Hardy is quick to remark that:

" . . . though a limited series, it was one from which he had acquired more sound information by diligent perusal than many a man of opportunities has done from a furlong of laden shelves." (p. 63)

It has been noted above that the peasants as a group have no real sense of time, (at least in the disjointed and abstract sense that we know it), but respond instinctively to the unending cycle of life; and it is within this context that Hardy suggests Gabriel's position between the rustics on one hand, and the more detached characters on the other, for whom time has a very definite significance.⁷ One of the first things we discover about Gabriel is his ownership of a watch so ancient that

it now manifests the eccentricities that make it wholly a part of the rural environment. But Gabriel does not need to rely upon mechanical assistance alone:

"The stopping peculiarity of his watch Oak remedied by thumps and shakes, and he escaped any evil consequences from the other two defects by constant comparisons with and observations of the sun and stars, and by pressing his face close to the glass of his neighbour's windows, till he could discern the hour marked by the green-faced time-keepers within." (p. 2)

Hardy is clearly aiming for a happy medium, whereby his hero can assimilate certain advantages of the urban mentality without hazarding his rural integrity. Lines of connection are soon drawn, in order to emphasize the flexibility of Gabriel's nature, that bring the two consciousnesses into closer juxtaposition.

"Oak's motions, though they had a quiet energy, were slow, and their deliberateness accorded well with his occupation. Fitness being the basis of beauty, nobody could have denied that his steady swings and turns in and about the flock had elements of grace. Yet, although if occasion demanded, he could do or think a thing with as mercurial a dash as can the men of towns who are more to the manner born, his special power, morally, physically, and mentally, was static, owing little or nothing to momentum as a rule." (p. 9)

Paradoxically, in Gabriel's 'special power' lies the basic weakness of his position. Whilst his accord with his environment instills into him the positive virtues of stability and endurance, he is limited to

that outlook alone; there is no doubt that his education has broadened his view, but because he still fully accepts the validity of one particular way of life, he remains 'static' in his perception - and therefore his actions are the less effective for being predictable. In this respect, Gabriel is the immediate object of a truth that is universal. Hardy remarks of Gabriel's fleeting glimpse of an unknown woman, who turns out to be Bathsheba Everdene, that

"In making even horizontal and clear inspections we colour and mould according to the wants within us whatever our eyes bring in" (p. 12)

There is a basic human dilemma implicit in this statement, which questions the very nature of truth and reality; the simple fact that we are ourselves means that truth must be relative, limited to our individual capacities of perception; thus we finally arrive at the contradiction that at one and the same time, there is no such thing as truth, and truth is infinite.⁸

In terms of personal development, however, Gabriel is possibly the most mature character in the book:

"He was at the brightest period of masculine growth, for his intellect and his emotions were clearly separated: he had passed the time during which the influence of youth indiscriminately mingles them in the character of impulse. . . ." (p. 3)

- which is indisputably a stage beyond the natures of Boldwood, Bathsheba, and Troy.

Yet it is Gabriel's stubborn fidelity to his own self that separates him from Bathsheba, for it prevents him from empathising with her needs

as a woman. Gabriel is essentially a realist, which undoubtedly results in more steadfast and consistent behaviour, but which also makes him something of a bore. It provokes in him a heavy reticence that overrules the thrust-and-parry excitement of love-play; every action, every word is given the careful consideration that is a substitute for intuition. We discover Gabriel's attitude early on:

"He wishes she knew his impressions;
but he would as soon have thought of
carrying an odour in a net as of
attempting to convey the intangibilities of
his feeling in the coarse meshes of language.
So he remained silent." (p.18)

Despite the transparent sincerity of his marriage proposal, its cautious matter-of-factness stifles any element of romance. (Indeed, the scene is reminiscent of Parson Maybold's proposal to Fancy Day, in the eager enumeration of bonuses that would come in the wake of marriage - although Gabriel is perhaps less patronising, as he finds himself "...balanced between poetry and practicality..." in his offer.) His ingenuous acceptance of meaning at face-value places him at an immediate disadvantage with the capricious Bathsheba; for it allows her to assume a superior position in the encounter, to the point of claiming:

"I want somebody to tame me; I am
too independent; and you would never
be able to, I know!" (p.27)

Whilst we must respect the self-denying patience of his long watch over Bathsheba's misfortunes, we may be forgiven a certain regret that Gabriel has no touch of selfish egoism, no mood of reckless assertiveness, that might have excited Bathsheba's admission long before:

"I have thought so much more of you
since I fancied you did not want even

" 'to see me again' " (p. 357)

The truth is, that Gabriel Oak understands little more of the feminine mind than did Dick Dewy, for all Gabriel's education.

The reverse is true of Gabriel's rival, Sergeant Troy, who makes the pursuit of Femininity almost a way of life. Like Parson Maybold, he is the 'total representative' of the urban context, but he far transcends his predecessor in dynamic energy and brilliance. We are informed that he is the illegitimate offspring of an earl, and has been raised in the urban surroundings of Casterbridge as the son of a doctor. It appears that he was quick to develop the intellectual expertise demanded by an 'urban' education, and at the same time discover the restless dissatisfaction that denotes the alien consciousness. Thus " ' he wasted his gifted lot, and listed a soldier... ' " (p.). Already he is a wanderer, aware of his own intelligence and yet incapable of applying it; in this respect, he is rather more deceptive as a character than is the parson in Under the Greenwood Tree, since his egoistic quick-wittedness often resembles the instinctive behaviour characteristic of rural folk.

Thus Hardy brings his protagonists closer together - but it soon becomes clear that the bases of rural and urban consciousness remain as constant as ever. Just as Gabriel's involvement turns his education into an inhibition, so Troy's detachment transforms instinct into a sophisticated sexual weapon. The point is, that Troy's instinct is wholly toward self-gratification, and therefore his environment becomes a means to that end. His alienation from his surroundings permits him to manipulate events to suit his own impulsive needs. His understanding of others stems from cunning rather than sympathy, for in a very real sense, Troy is a rational animal - or, more explicitly, the 'lone wolf.'

Unrestricted by the fetters of tradition, Troy exhibits a freedom of action that is almost anarchic. Unlike Gabriel, he has no real sense of self--largely attributable to his lack of roots in any community, through which he can define himself. Troy's personality is therefore in constant flux; he can be all things to all men, assuming the role that best fits the occasion.

"He could in this way be one thing and seem another; for instance, he could speak of love and think of dinner; call on the husband to look at the wife; be eager to pay and intend to owe" (p. 151)

Being a creature of impulse, Troy lives for the moment. Unencumbered by the weight of the past, he has the buoyancy to ride over the surface of things, allowing them to carry him where they will - and then reacting to a sudden whim with "... as mercurial a dash..." as an animal pouncing upon its prey. He makes no attempt to initiate any course of events, but is quick to adopt a situation to his own purposes; for example, he capitalizes upon Fanny's mistake with respect to the churches to avoid marrying her, just as he later exploits his chance encounter with Bathsheba, with fatal consequences. One senses in Troy an obsession with doing something, as if it is only then that he can ignore the hollowness of his own being.

"Troy was full of activity, but his activities were less of a locomotive than a vegetative nature; and, never being based upon any original choice of foundation or direction, they were exercised on whatever object chance might place in their way" (p. 150)

The quote points the inadequacy of this kind of release, for there

is no consistent rationale behind Troy's activity; because he regards his environment solely as the instrument of self-gratification, he dissipates his energy indiscriminately, indulging himself in the pleasure of the moment.

"He was a man to whom memories were an encumbrance, and anticipations a superfluity. Simply feeling, considering and caring for what was before his eyes, he was vulnerable only in the present. . ." (p. 149)

Yet there is also a part of Troy constantly making a detached assessment of that moment; his nature is so thoroughly divided that he can stand back and watch himself act out a role. For this reason, every pleasure is a challenge, every challenge a pleasure, since it gives him an opportunity to entertain himself with his own prowess. Thus his exploitation of the initial encounter with Bathsheba is with no well-defined aim in mind, but simply for the immediate excitement of the chase; he is attracted by Bathsheba's beauty, and stimulated by her initial aloofness, which presents an irresistible challenge. And so, from the moment we meet Troy, he is manoeuvring for position, manipulating the situation whilst being part of it.

It is this narcissistic aspect of Troy's character that creates the illusion of involvement, which comes not from a feeling of unity with the environment, an innate awareness of the totality of being, but from something quite opposite - an egotistical separation that turns life into the ultimate adversary. Every circumstance is viewed in these terms; every relationship becomes a skirmish that Troy is obsessed with winning - and which explains his persistent aggressiveness. His sword-display, whilst being an effective symbol of sexual attraction, is also a typically flamboyant gesture of defiance to the universe - brilliant, but futile. But perhaps the best illustration of Troy's lonely estrangement from the world

is in the macabre scene at Fanny's grave, when the gargoyle obliterates all trace of Troy's laborious efforts to sublimate his remorse. In a crisis of identity, Troy fails to find anything except another role - the blame for which must go to his powerful opponent:

"A man who has spent his primal strength in journeying in one direction has not much spirit left for reversing his course. Troy had, since yesterday, faintly reversed his; but the merest opposition had disheartened him. To turn about would have been hard enough under the greatest providential encouragement; but to find that Providence, far from helping him into a new course, or showing any wish that he might adopt one, actually jeered his first trembling and critical attempt in that kind, was more than nature could bear. . . ." (p. 287)

Significantly, Troy maintains a role to the bitter end. Having re-encountered Bathsheba - appropriately enough, whilst playing the part of the highwayman, Dick Turpin, in a travelling fair - Troy once again determines to capitalize upon a chance occurrence. Dressed in ". . . a heavy grey overcoat of Noachian art, with cape and high collar. . . ." (p. 330), he intrudes, as a mysterious stranger, upon what is essentially a wedding-feast for Bathsheba and Boldwood, in order to claim his bride. The familiar ballad-tales of Death intervening at a time of celebration to claim a fair victim is given an ironical twist as Troy's final role is turned upon himself, and his conflict is over at last.

In Bathsheba Everdene, Hardy confronts the issues he had avoided with Fancy Day - and the remarkable contrast between the two women bears witness to the extent of Hardy's miscalculation in Under the Greenwood Tree. Their roles are essentially similar; once again, we are presented with a heroine ". . . insecurely poised between the country life to which she belongs and the city milieu that her imagination tantalizes her with. . . ." ⁹ Like Fancy, Bathsheba is well-educated in an urban sense, (" . . . she was going to be a governess once. . . only she was

too wild. . . ' " (p. 24)) for her instruction seems to have instilled a certain confidence that comes from an awareness of her own powers. Without perhaps realising it, she is detached from herself, and therefore has the freedom to create roles, and to take pleasure from playing them. By contrast, Gabriel's education has had no moulding effect; it has been little more than an extraneous addition to an already solid core, in no way changing his approach to life. Thus Bathsheba is Hardy's second heroine to occupy a kind of no-man's-land between the two cultures, capable of turning either way.

"Bathsheba's was an impulsive nature under a deliberative aspect. . . 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."

In a sense, it is Gabriel's blunt marriage proposal that sets in motion Bathsheba's course of suffering, since it causes her to project an image that she finds appealing; she discovers the attraction in throwing up a veil of words behind which she can move about and watch the reactions of the other person. It is ironic that Gabriel has already detected in Bathsheba the vanity that in large part motivates her behaviour - and yet cannot perceive it in all its various manifestations, simply because he himself is psychologically incapable of such dissimulation. Thus his response to Bathsheba is an implicit acceptance of her version of reality - which is clearly a very undesirable occurrence. From the beginning,

illusion has become a reality over which Bathsheba exercises confident control; her inexperience conceals the relativity of her perception, so that she, like Troy, fails to comprehend the separateness of other human beings. It is this egotistic partiality of vision that allows her to send the valentine to Farmer Boldwood, with tragic consequences; she is ingeniously unaware of what she is doing

"Bathsheba was far from dreaming that the dark and silent shape upon which she had so carelessly thrown a seed was a hotbed of tropic intensity. Had she known Boldwood's moods, her blame would have been fearful, and the stain upon her heart ineradicable. Moreover, had she known her present power for good or evil over this man, she would have trembled at her responsibility." (p. 108)

Indeed, Bathsheba has a curious ability to withdraw herself in an almost physical fashion from the responsibility of decision-making; in telling Gabriel that she does not love him, - "She contracted a yawn to an inoffensive smallness, so that it was hardly ill-mannered at all." (p. 27) again, in sending the valentine, - "Bathsheba, a small yawn upon her mouth, took the pen, and with off-hand serenity directed the missive to Boldwood. . . ." (p. 87). This suggests a fundamental division of consciousness; it appears that the role-playing side of Bathsheba's character is making a decisive move whilst her conscience turns away.

The latter instance has an unexpected effect, however, for Boldwood also accepts illusion for reality; Bathsheba is forced to recognize not only her irresponsible action, but the devastating consequences that can follow from such a thoughtless impulse ("Yet

each of those pleasures was just for the day - the day just for the pleasure. How was I to know that what is a pastime to all other men was death to you? . . . (p. 183)) It is a harrowing lesson, but through it she first perceives the true significance of life of other human beings, which she previously regarded as of secondary importance to her own.

Boldwood attempts to turn illusion into reality, but Troy counters illusion with further illusion. The distinction has far-reaching effects, for by simply out-playing Bathsheba at her own game, Troy is able to establish the superiority of making up his own rules. Bathsheba herself is too caught up in illusion to realise that Boldwood's pitiful dependence is but a mirror of her own situation.

"Bathsheba loved Troy in the way that only self-reliant women love when they abandon their self-reliance. When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength she is worse than a weak woman who has never had any strength to throw away. . . ." (p. 169)

One senses that the whole relationship between Troy and Bathsheba is ephemeral an accidental fusion of elements that have no business being together; from the first, there is a mutual fascination with images, which generates an unreality in their first meeting, befitting the nocturnal setting. Bathsheba is overpowered by Troy's bold assertiveness, since she has no perception of his nature - she has only experienced the almost obsessive honesty of her admirers. She tells him later:

" ' Ah, sergeant, it won't do - you are pretending!' she said, shaking her head.
 'Your words are too dashing to be true.'
 'I am not, upon the honour of a soldier.' " (p. 158)

And so it is Bathsheba who is thrown off guard, into the customary feminine emotions of fear and attraction, pleasure and disgust. Troy has instinctively and expertly assumed the right role - and from that moment, disaster is inevitable, as two egotistical people lose themselves in the mists of illusion. This is the culmination of detachment - their alienation from their environment is reflected in their alienation from themselves. It is perhaps significant that the consummation of the relationship should take place in the urban foreignness of Bath - although Joseph Poorgrass concedes that " ' . . . the sky and the earth in the Kingdom of Bath is not altogether different from ours here. 'Tis for our good to gain knowledge of strange cities. . . ' " (p. 200)

Having no substance, however, illusion can only turn to disillusion, which creates for Bathsheba a long and terrible ordeal, as Troy tires of his role. Once again, she is forced to recognize her own self-deception, whilst living with the consequences; in a sense, she must purge away the ugliness of her self-centred existence, and replace it with a sympathetic awareness that is forgetful of self. Hardy conveys this profound psychological crisis through the symbol of a swamp near which Bathsheba sleeps, after her rejection by Troy; her awakening becomes a manifest release from her previous self.

"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 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 the night on the brink of so dismal a place." (p. 274)

The first thing she hears is a child reciting the collect.

Thus Bathsheba acquires the self-knowledge that allows her to return, not only to the rural environment, but to herself. The connection is significant, for the implication is that 'urban' detachment results in appearance becoming reality - life based on illusion. In that case, of course, impulse becomes a valuable quality, since it is a stimulus to the prompt action that ensures personal advantage.

By contrast, rural consciousness is characterised by its depth, rather than any superficial attractiveness. Secure in its sense of 'belonging,' it can face tribulation with stoical calm - even if it can do little to influence the direction of events. The difference between Gabriel and Boldwood serves to define this involvement more fully. Although Gabriel is as much affected by Bathsheba's waywardness as Boldwood, he nevertheless has the resource of his work to counter-balance his suffering. He is committed to life in a way that Boldwood is not, and derives from that responsibility the perseverance that the farmer so visibly lacks. Irving Howe, in his discussion of the theme of moral discipline, puts the matter succinctly.

"What helps to make the theme of discipline dramatically concrete and to situate it in the experience of the characters is Hardy's stress upon the importance of work in the rural community. . . Bathsheba, in all her emotional phases, is steadily responsible to her farm and the men who work on it; that proves to be her salvation. Troy neglects his fields as he neglects his wife; it is a crime. Boldwood neglects his fields as he neglects his dignity; it is an illness. Oak speaks through his hands, which are trained to do the work that must be done, regardless of weather, temptation or disappointment. Work makes Oak the center of stability that he is, it gives him an objective reality more significant than his narrow repertoire of feelings." 10

Bathsheba's return to Gabriel is the climax of her unconscious pilgrimage in search of self-awareness, and is presented as a wholly satisfactory conclusion to the work - and yet there are reasons for doubt. The notion that 'everything comes to he who waits' is hardly justification in itself for Gabriel's final success - he has offered no positive resistance to Troy's dynamism and Boldwood's persistence. Again, the rural virtues have shown themselves to be essentially passive in nature - Gabriel's patience is frequently termed 'unmanly.' It is hardly a fair assessment, but it does sometimes seem that he is simply the only one left - sole survivor of a relentless process of elimination.

We may also feel that Bathsheba cannot entirely share Gabriel's rustic security, since she has ventured too far outside the fold. Her husband can never understand the nature of her experiences, despite his unwavering affection. Like her predecessor in Under the Greenwood Tree,

her position of perilous balance between the rural and urban worlds has denied her membership in either. Yet this reservation is perhaps less valid for Bathsheba than for Fancy, for the former has indulged her impulse to the full, and paid her price; Fancy must always wonder what might have happened. For that reason, Bathsheba may be regarded as the more content of the two. Hardy himself is optimistic of the future:

"Theirs was that substantial affection which arises (if any arises at all) when the two who are thrown together begin first by knowing the rougher sides of each other's character, and not the best till further on, the romance growing up in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality. . . ." (p. 357)

FOOTNOTES

1. Thomas Hardy, Preface (1912) to Under the Greenwood Tree, p. vii.
2. J. F. Danby, op. cit., p. 12.
3. Richard C. Carpenter, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1964), p. 30.

Upon the same subject, Howe remarks:

"There is a relationship, extremely hard to fix in language, between the characters and the natural setting a partial sharing in rhythm and motion, upsurge and rest." (op. cit. p. 54)

4. It is interesting to note two very similar passages in the novels under discussion, both of which bring out the constantly changing nature of human relationships. The passage in Under the Greenwood Tree (p. 22) refers to William Dewy, and in Far From the Madding Crowd (p. 1) to Gabriel Oak.
5. ". . . the reader who has any general acquaintance with the civilization of the Wiltshire or Dorsetshire labourer, with his average wages, and his average intelligence, will be disposed to say at once that a more incredible picture than that of the group of farm labourers as a whole which Mr. Hardy has given us can hardly be conceived. . . "

R. H. Hutton, The Spectator, 19th Dec. 1874.

Quoted in Thomas Hardy and his Readers (ed. Lerner and Holstrom) p. 26.

6. George Wing makes the same point:

"It is interesting to notice how Dick differs from other peasant heroes and heroines. Although they are from the same class, Gabriel Oak, Giles Winterborne and Tess stand out from their illiterate fellows, partly, ironically enough, through the influence of an education self-pursued or government-bestowed.

On the other hand, apart from his native wit, Dick is as innocent of learning as Thomas Leaf. . . " (p. 45).

7. We may detect something of this contrast in attitude in Henry Fray's ". . . Oriental indifference to the flight of time." (p. 124) when Bathsheba's sheep are dying, and the description of the grotesque church-clock as Sergeant Troy waits in vain for his bride.

"Some persons in the church may have noticed how extraordinarily the striking of quarters seem to quicken the flight of time. . ." (p. 103)

8. Erich Fromm, in his book The Art of Loving, makes some interesting remarks about paradoxical logic. In discussing the solutions offered by Eastern thought, he says:

"In their search for unity behind manifoldness, the Brahman thinkers came to the conclusion that the perceived pair of opposites reflects the nature not of things but of perceiving mind. The perceiving thought must transcend itself if it is to attain true reality. Opposition is a category of man's mind, not in itself an element of reality."

Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York, 1967), p. 64.

9. Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy (London, 1954) p. 48.
10. Irving Howe, Thomas Hardy (New York, 1967), p. 53-54.

iii) The Return of the Native

In The Return of the Native (1878), Hardy turns away from the lush pastoral setting of the two previous Wessex novels, to create a scene more in keeping with the darker implications of his thought. It was suggested above that the role of the environment undergoes a subtle change in Far From the Madding Crowd; as Hardy delved deeper into the psyches of his characters, so perception of the natural world became increasingly relative, reflecting individual awareness and state of mind. Rarely do we find description that is not related in some way to the human presence; often it is highly imagistic, with the result that symbolic vibrations radiate out from the immediate situation. We may take as an example Gabriel's discovery of the loss of his sheep.

"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 to a phosphoric streak upon the water." (p. 32-3)

The whole picture is conveyed through macabre images of death, which is obviously the burning reality in Gabriel's mind, in a sense, the pond has no reality beyond Gabriel's consciousness of it, since we can only look at it through Gabriel's eyes. This is the point; Nature has become a mirror of man's psychological existence.¹ Many

separate instances could be found in the pages of Far From the Madding Crowd; in Hardy's next work of importance, the prevalent mood is determined by one massive image of solemnity, Egdon Heath. It is significant that in the 1895 Preface to The Return of the Native, Hardy connects Egdon with the heath upon which Shakespeare's King Lear endured the firmament storm that corresponded to his own mental stress; we may speculate that Hardy was not unaffected by this vivid demonstration of man's interrelationship with his environment.

Compared with the colourful variety of the idyllic scene, the heath is virtually a non-image, ". . . singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. . . ." (p. 13); much of its importance lies in the fact that it remains massively and inscrutably constant, exuding an almost tangible Buddha-like presence over the petty struggles of its human occupants. Hardy is again concerned to emphasize the relativity of experience, however; man's existence may appear futile and ephemeral in relation to the brooding immutability of the heath, yet in his own eyes, it may assume Promethean grandeur and intensity - and who is in a position to say where reality lies, between these two extremes?

Far From the Madding Crowd implied that a stable reality could be achieved through the discipline of self-knowledge; by gradually discarding the escapist fantasies of youth, one could find a solid contentment and security in traditional patterns of living. The Return of the Native casts a doubt over such a solution, by suggesting that an illusion can sometimes be more real than 'reality' - and conversely, reality can turn

out to be little more than an illusion; everything depends upon the impact of the experience, the extent to which it is lived. Thus a dream may convey a 'reality' far more vivid than the half-assimilated trivia of consciousness, which clearly brings us down to the fundamental problem of what constitutes reality. Hardy's answer is to show that truth is relative at every level, depending upon what we are looking at, and through whose eyes - and here we may begin to recognize the intricate movement of Hardy's technique, as he shifts from perspective to perspective, seldom reassuring us with an 'absolute' reality. But in *The Return of the Native*, there is one absolute, one permanent source of energy:

"It is the primitive, primal earth, where the instinctive life heaves up. There, in the deep, rude stirring of the instincts, there was the reality that worked the tragedy. . . The Heath heaved with raw instinct. Egdon, whose dark soil was strong and crude and organic as the body of a beast. Out of the body of this crude earth are born Eustacia, Wildeve, Mistress Yeobright, Clym, and all the others. They are one year's accidental crop. . . The Heath persists. It's body is strong and fecund, it will bear many more crops beside this. . ." ²

The rich farmland depicted in the earlier novels undeniably fosters in its human inhabitants a warm sense of being needed, for the people are part of a process that is as natural as the earth itself. The heath, on the other hand, manifests a grim indifference to humanity; there is little basis for any sense of physical harmony, for Egdon evolves not from season to season, but from age to age. Life on Egdon offers few

rewards, yet it demands an unceasing perseverance simply to maintain a precarious foothold. For this reason, the rustic community in this work lacks much of the idiosyncratic vitality of the regulars at Warren's malthouse; because of their more tenuous association with their environment, they appear more vulnerable than their predecessors. In fact, there is a definite division in the chorus, which implicitly reveals Hardy's changing perception of the rural personality. On the one hand there is the Cantle family, father and son; on the other, such characters as Timothy Fairway, Humphrey, and Susan Nunsuch.

Grandfar Cantle is an anachronism in more ways than one. Although the most lively and colourful member of the rural community, he is nevertheless the object of Hardy's gentle ridicule; behind his affected robustness, we may sense a rather pathetic old man, desperately striving to ignore "Time's winged Chariot hurrying near!" In Far From the Madding Crowd, reference to the past was a matter of nostalgia - here it has an obsessive tinge:

" ' But in the year four 'twas said
there wasn't a finer figure in the whole
South Wessex than I, as I looked when
dashing past the shop-winders with the
rest of our company on the day we ran
out o' Budmouth because it was thoughted
that Boney had landed round the point. " (p. 47)

His son Christian is likewise a figure familiar to the rustic scene, the natural successor to Thomas Leaf in Under the Greenwood

Tree (" . . . a faltering man, with reedy hair, no shoulders, and a great quantity of wrist and ankle beyond his clothes. . ." (p. 31)). Yet Christian too is essentially impotent, a mixture of feebleness and guillibility that renders him completely open to exploitation. And so the Cantles are the last of a breed, as Hardy realised that the primitive rustic character, descended from ancient forbears, could no longer survive the challenge of urban aggression; it was apparent in Far From the Madding Crowd, when the farm-workers succumbed so thoroughly to the irresponsible debauch presided over by Sergeant Troy. We may wonder whether the self-indulgent moments of idyllic bliss in this work forced Hardy to reject the fantasy in The Return of the Native - with the result that Grandfer and Christian Cattle, whilst remaining sympathetic characters, are nevertheless the anachronistic survivors of a forgotten way of life.

The other members of this group are of a different stamp; more unobtrusive and muted, they lack the distinctiveness of their earlier counterparts. Their business is first and foremost with the heath, which only reluctantly permits them their living. In this sense, they are perhaps more recognizable as nineteenth-century country-dwellers, for whom agrarian life was a matter of constant hardship and toil, with little hope of improvement. This more realistic approach also brings out a darker side of the rural consciousness, now that 'living in the past' no longer provides its own justification; suddenly there is a hint of stagnancy, as even the merry-making relies upon repetition of ancient custom, rather than spontaneous innovation - as, for example, the

Christmas mumming.

"The mummers themselves were not afflicted with any such feeling as contempt for their art, though at the same time they were not enthusiastic. A traditional pastime is to be distinguished from a mere revival in no more striking feature than in this, that while in the revival all is excitement and fervour, the survival is carried on with a stolidity and absence of stir which sets one wondering why a thing that is done so perfunctorily should be kept up at all." (p. 129)

Hardy's vantage-point has shifted, so that we now find ourselves looking back, instead of actually being there; we find a detachment, perhaps born of disillusion, that allows us to look more objectively at rural life - and to perceive the shortcomings that are slowly draining its vitality. Thus some less attractive remnants of the past manifest themselves in Susan Nunsuch's preoccupation with superstitious 'black magic', which illustrates a side of the rural personality hitherto unseen; when the regularity of instinctive life is disturbed by an 'irrational' fear, that fear is curable only through irrational means. Although Hardy himself is equivocal about the existence of magical powers, it nevertheless appears here as a very inadequate and out-dated resource; an implicit admission that in times of stress there is no other answer but ". . . a ghastly invention of superstition, calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy, and annihilation on any human being against whom it was directed." (p. 361)

We have come a long way from the blissful 'natural harmony' evinced by

the great barn and its shearers, in Far From the Madding Crowd.

In these circumstances, we may suspect that Hardy encountered some difficulty in defining the nature of his rustic hero. On the one hand, he has to be fully representative of the rural way of life, and yet possess qualities that make him a positive factor in the shaping of events; this was the lesson Hardy learnt from the character of Gabriel Oak, who, despite his steady energy, had no capacity for initiating any course of action. Slowly but surely, Hardy is having to modify his notion of the countryman, bringing him closer to urban awareness, merely to give him some chance of survival against the challenge of that same life-style. And so, in *The Return of the Native*, the strain of this 'divided consciousness' begins to show through, in the element of unreality that surrounds the figure of Diggory Venn. Douglas Brown remarks that "Venn seems not to belong to plot or character, as these are usually understood. He is like a chord, modulating between the heath and the fable. . . He exerts an odd fascination, for he is a particularly apt projection of Hardy's feeling for the country at this time; a man, so to speak, dyed into a way of life, and that way fast disappearing."³

Yet Diggory is by no means a reedleman through vocation or necessity; although he presents the image of this traditional rural figure, it is essentially a role, which he can use to different ends. He himself remarks that he " . . . only took to this business for a freak; and I might turn my hand to something else in good time. " (p. 104)

This surely marks a significant psychological development in the rural personality, for Diggory's change of occupation is not the outcome of an unavoidable reversal, as was Gabriel Oak's return to the position of shepherd; it is a conscious, unpredictable decision, taken in a cynically clear state of mind, Hardy tells us, after Diggory's ill-fated romance with Thomasin. (One might irreverently consider it the rural equivalent to joining the French Foreign Legion). The question arises, however, of why Diggory should choose the dwindling reddle trade, especially when one considers its undesirable effect upon the human appearance. Is it a gesture, conscious or otherwise, against the social niceties that apparently played a part in his initial disappointment? Or is it a manifestation of his singular nature, that finds an affinity with the mystique of a reddleman's existence? Hardy is inexplicit - which raises a third alternative, that reflects his own dilemma regarding the rural psyche.

It may be argued that Hardy chose this almost anachronistic rural trade to offset the more unexpected aspects of Diggory's character, such as his aggressiveness and his foresight, that have hitherto been exclusively urban characteristics. At no point do we see Diggory actively involved in his trade; on the contrary, we are told that he neglects it in order to remain on unprofitable Egdon and watch over Thomasin's welfare the better. In this respect, Diggory's occupation is little more than an expedient; unlike his predecessor Gabriel Oak, he finds no sense of personal integrity or identity in his work.

The point is that Diggory consistently behaves as a free agent, capable of assuming full control over his destiny - and therefore he is rarely at any psychological disadvantage to the sophisticated 'urban' characters, since he shares their mental mobility. Occupying this somewhat nebulous middle-ground between rural innocence and urban awareness, he is sufficiently detached from his environment to adapt it to strategic ends - as, for example, his use of the turves for concealment at the secret meeting between Eustacia and Wildeve, and later, the ambushes he lays to disconcert the impetuous Wildeve.

At the same time, of course, it may be argued that it is his intuitive sense of unity with the heath that enables him to employ it almost as an accomplice against the alien intruders; and in this way we are brought back to the confusing duality of Diggory's nature. The reddleman is perhaps Hardy's most concerted attempt to combine the basic characteristics of both the rural and urban psyches into a single personality, with the emphasis bearing to the rural side. His success is measurable in Diggory's credibility as a rustic hero.

Several critics remark on Diggory's passivity,⁴ as one of the traditional rural qualities that he embodies - and yet is his role really passive? Both the instances mentioned above reveal Diggory actively intervening in a situation that affects Thomasin's happiness - he even takes the step of confronting Eustacia.

"He had determined upon the bold stroke of asking for an interview with Miss Vye - to attack her position either by art or by storm, showing therein, somewhat too conspicuously, the want of gallantry characteristic of a certain astute sort of man, from clown to kings." (p. 96)

Surely we may claim that such initiative distinguishes him from his predecessors, who lacked the assertiveness that defines itself in such positive action. Indeed, it denotes the self-confident independence that is associated with the estranged urban character, unrestricted by any feeling of harmony with his surroundings.

Diggory Venn remains an enigma, a character "humanly unexplained," as George Wing puts it,⁵ simply because Hardy is unable to achieve a satisfactory fusion of opposites. The balance between Diggory's 'urbanised' consciousness (he is described as having ". . . an acuteness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft. . . ." (p. 87)), and his out-dated rural occupation is too precarious for explicitness - and so Hardy is forced to shroud him in mystery and ambiguity. It is perhaps for this reason that Hardy took the drastic step of adding a footnote to the effect that ". . . the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn. He was to have retained his isolated and weird character to the last, and to have disappeared mysteriously from the heath, nobody knowing whither. . . ." (p. 402-footnote)

The choice of conclusions that is offered us demonstrates Hardy's fundamental uncertainty before the two 'realities' that confronted him; should he pursue the imaginative reality of the world created within

the pages of The Return of the Native, or should he bow to the comfortable security of Victorian convention, and transform the enigmatic Diggory into an acceptably domesticated family-man? It would seem somewhat out of character for Hardy to devise such an obviously 'happy' ending unless he felt a considerable sympathy for it - in which case the footnote becomes little more than a gesture to conscience. As we shall see, Hardy is faced with a similar problem in the conclusion of Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and reacts in a similar way.

Thomasin Yeobright is in some respects the successor to Bathsheba Everdene, in the line of Hardy's rural heroines; their situations are in fact remarkably similar, for both women begin by rejecting the proposals of rural suitors, succumb (with unhappy results) to the beguiling unfamiliarity of an 'urban' outsider, and finally return, much chastened, to their long-suffering swains. There is a considerable difference in personality, however, for Thomasin is quite without Bathsheba's fire and vitality; her beauty is of a more fragile, ethereal nature, since it is the reflection of "An ingenuous, transparent life. . . as if the flow of her existence could be seen passing within her." (p. 45-6). She has a gentle impressionability reminiscent of Dick Dewy, in Under the Greenwood Tree; and we soon discover that her character retains an innocence that denies her any protection against the barbs of more insensitive natures. In comparing her presence with that of a bird, Hardy suggests not only quickness and frailty, but also naturalness - for Thomasin belongs to the

heath as much as the birds.

"In her movements, in her gaze, she reminded the beholders of the feathered creatures who lived around her home. All similes and allegories concerning her began and ended with birds. There was as much variety in her motions as in their flight. . . ." (p. 219)

Her opinion of Diggory is undoubtedly much influenced by the strong personality of Mrs. Yeobright, and thus her refusal of marriage may be seen as a demonstration of the latter's class-consciousness; but unless we consider Mrs. Yeobright's domination subtle indeed, Thomasin also shows a reluctance on her own part. It corresponds with Bathsheba's early behaviour toward Gabriel - and it appears that on both occasions the women gain the upper hand through the men's acquiescent sexuality. Bathsheba overcomes Gabriel's seriousness by refusing him half in jest - but Thomasin is positively nonplussed by Diggory's unexpected proposal. She tells him in an explanatory letter:

"I did not in the least expect that you were going to speak on such a thing when you followed me, because I had never thought of you in the sense of a lover at all. You must not becall me for laughing when you spoke; you mistook when you thought I laughed at you as a foolish man, I laughed because the idea was so odd, and not you at all. . . ." (p. 87-8)

The suggestion is that rural man has lost the 'mystique' of his virility, that evokes in woman an emotion finely compounded of fear, awe, and hatred; because he is the product of a static and impotent community, he has finally lost the mystery of his being.⁶

So Thomasin likewise is attracted to the glamour of a more aggressive consciousness, and quickly submits to Wildeve's impetuous courtship. Yet, in addition to the temptation of a more overt sexuality, there is an unconscious desire to escape - the impulse of a half-awakened awareness to investigate a reality that exists beyond rural bounds. For Thomasin, Wildeve is the romantic representative of that new reality, for he comes to the heath as a somewhat mysterious stranger, rather than an urban failure. Hardy does not show us the early stages of the relationship, however; we meet Thomasin as the first seeds of disillusion take root - as she begins, like Bathsheba before her, to distinguish appearance from reality. Wildeve's neglect forces her to develop a self-sufficiency that instils in her a new dignity and grace, attained through a suffering that for the first time makes her aware of her own separate being - imprisoned by the chains of social convention.

" ' I am a warning to others, just as thieves and drunkards and gamblers are. . .
 What a class to belong to; Do I really belong to them? 'Tis absurd! Yet why, aunt, does everybody keep on making me think that I do, by the way they behave towards me? Why don't people judge me by my acts? (p. 119)

Amidst the continuing human upheaval, one senses that it is the solid endurance of the heath that helps Thomasin come to terms with her lot. Her intuitive awareness of life's boundless energy has been temporarily obscured by her infatuation for Wildeve, which cut her off from herself; yet his demise is, in a sense, her release, for she can now return from the claustrophotic nullity of her marriage to a reality

that has proven itself by its perseverance.

"The Heath persists. . . Here is the sombre, latent power that will go on producing, no matter what happens to the product. Here is the deep, black source from whence all these little contents of lives are drawn. And the contents of the small lives are spilled and wasted. There is savage satisfaction in it; for so much more remains to come, such a black, powerful fecundity is working there that what does it matter?" 7

So far we have considered those characters who have accepted the heath as an absolute, and have thus unconsciously shaped their lives to conform with its immutable presence. To these people, the heath holds no menace, since they have an intuitive awareness of its being; what they see as stability appears to others as inertia - and what to them is indifference is hostility to others. They give no conscious thought to abiding by the dictates of life on Egdon - like the rustics of Mellstock and Weatherby before them, they derive their security from being part of a greater whole. We may imagine that Thomasin is representative of the rural attitude when she says " 'I like what I was born near to: I admire its grim old face.' " (p. 354)

The remark is made to her husband, Damon Wildeve, who has no understanding of what she means, because he embraces a totally different outlook upon life. It has been mentioned above that he is an 'urban' character, who has escaped his failure within that context by imposing himself upon the rural scene, in the role of a publican. Not surprisingly, his cynical 'foreignness' makes "The Quiet Woman" a gloomy

successor to the colourful hostelries of Far From the Madding Crowd, because this inn has lost its communal warmth and certainty.

Like Troy before him, Wildeve is a man alienated from himself. He lacks the involvement to commit himself to any consistent line of action, as his brief episode as an engineer would suggest, and therefore must pursue the more immediate goals, the accomplishment of which give him a reassurance of his own existence.

"The grace of his movement was singular; it was the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career. . . Altogether he was one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike." (p. 50)

Paradoxically, it is Wildeve's dissatisfaction with his own existence that makes him appear sexually attractive; his preoccupation with self is not exploratory, but escapist. Thus he exudes an egoism that, on an instinctive level, suggests virility - but is, in fact, the manifestation of inner hollowness. Some insight into Wildeve's motivation may be found in Erich Fromm's analysis of the selfish person.

"The selfish person does not love himself too much but too little; in fact he hates himself. This lack of fondness and care for himself, which is only one expression of his lack of productiveness, leaves him empty and frustrated. He is necessarily unhappy and anxiously concerned to snatch from life the satisfaction which he blocks himself from attaining. He seems to care too much for himself, but actually he only makes an unsuccessful attempt to cover up and compensate for his failure to care for his real self." ⁸

For this reason, his marriage with Thomasin cannot prove successful, because Wildeve has nothing to offer within the relationship. His attitude is exemplified in his careless mistake over the marriage licence, (" ' Such things don't happen for nothing, ' said the aunt. . ." (p. 50)), which causes the susceptible Thomasin so much distress, and Wildeve himself so little concern. Yet he is not a callous person; his egoism simply prevents him from sympathising with any position beyond his own. His instinct is to use Thomasin as a willing instrument, to manipulate her like a trump-card in the game he is playing with Eustacia Vye. Once again, comparison with Sergeant Troy is unavoidable, for both men plunge into marriage as the final, reckless play that wins them the game - but their moment of triumph is as costly as it is short-lived. Both men lose all sense of proportion in their obsessive desire to maintain their image; they are enslaved by the never-peased hunger of their egos.

Only when the actors come together are we able to see their private projection of reality, invented to satisfy their own particular fantasies. Wildeve confesses to Eustacia:

" ' . . . the curse of inflammability is upon me, and I must live under it, and take any snub from a woman. It has brought me down from engineering to innkeeping; what lower stage it has in store for me I have yet to learn. ' " (p. 70-1)

The romance between Wildeve and Eustacia has the precarious balance of a hard-fought battle, each side trying to out-manoeuvre the

other to regain the initiative. The relationship is the unwanted offspring of their selfish needs; beneath the desire to possess is a fierce, animal impulse to hate and destroy. Thus Wildeve, when his plan to marry Thomasin goes astray, is concerned for himself alone.

"To lose the two women - he who had been the well-beloved of both - was too ironical an issue to be endured. He could only decently save himself by Thomasin; and once he became her husband, Eustacia's repentance, he thought, would set in for a long and bitter term." (p. 162)

Because the urban character relies so heavily upon surface reality, the emphasis is inevitably laid upon presenting the most desirable image. This is the source of the urban character's energy - the reason he conveys the impression of dynamic resourcefulness and independence. The fact is, that he always has to keep one jump ahead, constantly having something to offer, that will conceal his inner emptiness. It follows that he too is ". . . attracted always from outside, and never driven from within. . ." ⁹

The closest Wildeve comes to a selfless act is his offer to take Eustacia away from Egdon, for at last he begins to recognize Eustacia as a person in her own right. The pervasive actualities of his own unsatisfactory marriage, of Eustacia's deep distress, and even Diggory Venn's determined intervention, have all jolted him into a dim awareness of other people's lives. It is ironic that this new-found sympathy should be the indirect cause of their violent deaths.

Unlike the earlier Wessex novels, in The Return of the Native it is rather more difficult to attribute upheaval solely to urban intruders, who temporarily infect rural tranquility with the insecurity of their own alienation. The world of Egdon has lost its rural insulation, for here we encounter the urban consciousness attempting to establish a separate way of life within the rural context. In this way, the heath has acquired an alternative aspect, which reflects the rational detachment of some of its inhabitants.

"Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learned emotion, than that which responds to the host of beauty called charming and fair." (p. 12)

As we have seen, the urban character perceives his environment through the filter of individual consciousness, beyond which there is no reality. Because life is relative to self, it can have no independent being - and therefore must be interpreted in purely personal terms. This is the source of complaints that the heath is made too much of a 'character' in the novel, that it cannot support the dramatic weight that is placed upon it.¹⁰ Yet this reading neglects the fact that the heath represents something different to each of the 'urban' characters, and hence assumes a many-sidedness that critics mistake for a separate identity. The heath is all these things and none of these things; it attains a substantial reality only for the rustics, simply because they have not conceptualised their environment, made it finite by imposing upon it abstract characteristics and limits. Their psychological unity with their

surroundings renders quite irrelevant, (as far as they are concerned),
Hardy's remark that

"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." (p. 13)

At first glance, it may appear strange that a woman with such 'urban' qualities as Mrs. Yeobright should have lived so long upon Egdon - one would have expected her to escape its gloomy indifference at the first opportunity. But as we come to understand her better, we perceive that very indifference providing a subtle appeal to the rational consciousness, in that it countenances without protest the indulgence of personal illusion. Despite her apparent loneliness, Mrs. Yeobright has a profound need of the heath and its people, in order to maintain her image of a somewhat superior gentlewoman, commanding the respect of those about her.

"She had something of an estranged mien; . . . The air with which she looked at the heathmen betokened a certain unconcern at their presence, . . . thus indirectly implying that in some respect or other they were not up to her level. . . Her normal manner among the heathfolk had that reticence which results from the consciousness of superior communicative power." (pp. 39-40)

Although she lives in rural circumstances, she adheres to the rigid conventions of urban society. Her concern is with appearances, not with realities; it is for the sake of her own reputation (and that of Thomasin)

that she scolds the latter so severely, after the confusion over her marriage. (Thomasin's first words to her aunt are "'Excuse me - for humiliating you, aunt. . . ' " (p. 47)) - and we soon discover that it was essentially Mrs. Yeobright's class-consciousness that prevented Diggory from pressing his own claim for Thomasin. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Yeobright has a far greater insight into Wildeve's motivation than Thomasin, because she can interpret the uncommitted aimlessness of his character; nevertheless, her intervention is aroused by basically selfish considerations.

It is her preoccupation with the visible proof of success, as she herself defines it, that causes friction with her son, Clym. Both are trapped within their own minds, egotistically unable to see through any eyes but their own. Clym's change of direction provokes in his mother a bitter frustration that appears excessive, until we realise that his decision is an implicit rejection of her rationality. Suddenly we perceive the fundamental aloneness of both individuals - they have no common ground even for argument.

"There was in Clym's face that hopelessness of being understood which comes when the objector is constitutionally beyond the reach of a logic that, even under favouring conditions, is almost too coarse a vehicle for the subtlety of the argument." (p. 182)

The aptness of Hardy's earlier sub-title ('My Mind to me a Kingdom is') becomes very apparent.

The separation of feeling and reason creates a strange relationship between mother and son, the complexity of which Hardy glosses over, merely remarking that:

"Of love it may be said, the less earthy the less demonstrative. In its absolutely indestructible form it reaches a profundity in which all exhibition of itself is painful. It was so with these. . . ." (p. 191)

In fact, Hardy tends to be somewhat vague about Mrs. Yeobright; he makes pointed reference to her 'singular insight into life' (p. 196) (which he connects with intuition), and yet the "great world" appears to her only as "A multitude whose tendencies could be perceived, though not its essences." (p. 197) Perhaps this is the clue to her personality; her awareness is essentially intellectual, reflective, rather than having the basis of personal experience. This would explain her suspicion of Wildeve, and her hatred of Eustacia; she understands the motives of these 'urban' character simply because, to some extent, she shares them. If this is the case, then 'intuition' is a term that is valid only in a rather restricted sense.

Her resentment of Eustacia clearly begins with a mother's possessiveness - a fierce reluctance to allow any other woman a share of what she considers her own - but the psychological similarity between the two women arouses a mutual fear and hostility that reduces Clym's welfare almost to a secondary consideration. They are immeasurably separated by their own preconceptions; Mrs. Yeobright's sincere concern must transform itself into a petty scorn for Eustacia's heredity; (" . . .

A Corfu bandmaster's daughter! what has her life been? Her surname even is not her true one. . . ' " (p. 210)) On the other side, Eustacia also has the vulnerability that resolves itself in aggression - so that she retorts to Mrs. Yeobright's accusations:

"I understand you. . . you think me capable of every bad thing. Who can be worse than a wife who encourages a love and poisons her husband's mind against his relative? Yet that is now the character given to me. . . " (p. 250)

It is the mental isolation of the 'urban' characters that becomes the tragic factor in the work, for it proves too great a barrier to be overcome. Attempts are made, but their failure is inevitable, the division between separate consciousnesses is too profound to make verbal reconciliation a satisfactory solution. Thus Mrs. Yeobright makes her desperate journey across the heath, once again to be deceived by appearances; her desire to make amends is essentially a rational decision, involving no real development of sympathy or understanding - and so she lacks the resilience of personal conviction in encountering the unexpected.

Clym Yeobright has progressed one stage beyond his mother, by recognizing the superficiality of appearances - and yet through this awareness, he attains a degree of isolation that transcends all other 'urban' characters. He has perceived the artificiality of Paris life, and has rejected it as unreal, he therefore finds an alternative in returning to the rural way of life, which is a far cry from ". . . trafficking in glittering

splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines, and pandering to the meanest vanities. . . " (p. 182), The irony is that such a return is impossible; to repeat the words of Erich Fromm, "once man is torn away from nature he cannot return to it; once thrown out of paradise - a state of original oneness with nature - cherubim with flaming swords block his way, if he should try to return"¹¹ Clym may return to the heath in fact, but he is quite incapable of returning to it in spirit. He is in the limbo of disillusionment, which represents the ultimate challenge for 'rational' man - and his answer is to communicate his own alienation to the people of the heath. His vision stems from the belief that ". . . half the world is going to ruin for want of somebody to buckle to and teach them how to breast the misery they are born to. . . " (p. 182) Like his mother before him, Clym has no idea that there might be a life outside, that is totally independent of his existence - here embodied in the heath.

D. H. Lawrence remarks, in his brilliant study of Clym:

"The dark struggle of Egdon, a struggle into being as the furze struggles into flower, went on in him, but could not burst the enclosure of the idea, the system which contained him. Impotent to be he must transform himself, and live in an abstraction, in a generalization, he must identify himself with the system." ¹²

Even in the act of 'escape,' Clym remains within the system; there is no way he can escape his awareness of self, even if he wanted to. His venture into the diamond industry in Paris is surely intended as the urban counterpart to Diggory Venn's involvement with the reddle trade,

with the purpose of emphasizing Clym's psychological distance from his original environment. And, like all 'urban' characters, he must return with something to offer, that will make him a useful and positive human being, and thus push back the void.

Hardy is insistent about Clym's inwardness, as he lives out his assessment of life ". . . as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations. . . ." (p. 174) in order to reveal this very intellectual activity as the factor that separates him so irredeemably from the people he is planning to teach. The problem is that Clym does not perceive the egocentricity of his mental existence; he does not understand that his fundamental desire is to share his intellectual loneliness. To quote Lawrence again:

"What is Clym's altruism but a deep, very subtle cowardice, that makes him shirk his own being whilst apparently acting nobly; which makes him choose to improve mankind rather than to struggle at the quick of himself into being. He is not able to undertake his own soul, so he will take a commission for society to enlighten the souls of others." ¹³

Indeed, we may suspect motives in Clym's return that bear clear witness to the similarity between him and his mother; motives that use the heath as a means of self-justification. In Paris, Clym played a subservient role, which gave him no sense of being; by contrast, his knowledge must appear as a bright light shining over the primitive darkness of Egdon. His self-sacrifice is part of the image; it is the final,

insidious temptation of becoming a martyr for a Cause.

It was suggested in the Introduction that many of the descriptive passages concerning Eustacia are in fact intended to convey Eustacia's vision of herself rather than the author's; through the grandiose boldness of the language, Hardy is suggesting the romantic illusions that haunt an imaginative girl in an unsympathetic environment. We may also detect a similar technique with regard to Clym - for once again the descriptions seem strangely self-regarding and expansive. Could it not be that Clym also sees himself in glorious isolation, a forerunner of his time?

"Yeobright's local peculiarity was that in striving at high thinking he still cleaved to plain living - nay, wild and meagre living in many respects, and brotherliness with clowns.

He was a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text. Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date." (p. 179)

It is with such ambitious aims that Clym comes back to the heath - and the heath resists him. The partial blindness that is the result of excessive study is symbolic, for it is only when he is deprived of his rational detachment (in other words, his ability to absorb knowledge through reading), that he can return to the heath with any sense of belonging, as a man ". . . permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. . . ." (p. 180). The significant aspect about this episode of his life is that he loses almost all sense of self; the heath all but

takes him back to itself - but that is impossible.

"The silent being who thus occupied himself seemed to be of no more account in life than an insect. He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens and moss." (p. 283)

It is ironic that this period of relative contentment is achieved inadvertently, a temporary interruption of greater plans; it is the closest that Clym comes to making the return that he unconsciously desires.

There is little to say about Clym's relationship with Eustacia that does not repeat in different guise observations that have gone before. Both are attracted by the images they project of each other, and both reap a bitter harvest of disillusion. Clym sees in Eustacia an admirable wife for a prominent school-master, as she sees in Clym the means of escape to a more colourful and exciting life in Paris. The romance is doomed from the beginning, as both participants are vaguely aware - yet the prospect of escape proves too tempting.

"In spite of Eustacia's apparent willingness to wait through the period of an unpromising engagement, till he should be established in his new pursuit, he could not but perceive at moments that she loved him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past of his which so interested her." (p. 208)

Since they live through an image of their own selves, how can they fail to be deceived by an image of the other person? Once again, there is a feeling of tragic uncontrollability as two people plunge headlong into marriage; ironically, the legal bond creates a separate reality that serves to turn lovers into strangers, as both are unable to relate. In clinging to their personal illusions, Clym and Eustacia cut themselves off from each other; it becomes a battle of wills, for neither is willing to give up the dream that will supposedly fulfil their existence. The progress of disillusionment is ugly, as their mutual inflexibility turns hope into despair, infatuation into bitterness and contempt. The distance between the two is tragically apparent after the death of Mrs. Yeobright, when Clym's impetuous accusation of Eustacia reveals his unconscious attitude toward womankind:

"Most women, even when but slightly annoyed, show a flicker of evil in some curl of the mouth or some corner of the cheek; but as for her, [his mother] never in her angriest moments was there anything malicious in her look." (p. 334)

It appears that in the unexplored depths of Clym's mind, his strong relationship with his mother has turned her rival Eustacia into the archetypal whore (" 'Well, she's asleep now; and have you a hundred gallants, neither they nor you can insult her any more. . . ' " (p. 334))

Eustacia's death is a romantic gesture of defiance that is fitting to her nature; Clym is left with his martyrdom. He has really learnt

nothing from his experiences, so closed has been his mind. Thus it is apt that he should continue blindly in his futile path, and finally achieve a mockery of his original purpose, becoming a curiosity tolerated by the people of Egdon.

"As if the Egdon eremites had not already far more serene comprehensiveness than ever he had himself, rooted as they were in the soil of all things, and living from the root! . . . They should have taught him rather than he them." ¹⁴

The final irony of The Return of the Native is in the revelation that Eustacia is, in many ways, more 'natural' to the heath than Clym's. Although she does not understand or appreciate it as does Clym, nevertheless the heath fulfils her being; it is the physical source of part of her nature, and so, like Mrs. Yeobright, she needs it in order to be herself. Hardy supplies a hint of this connection at our first glimpse of Eustacia when Diggory Venn espies her on the summit of Rainbarrow:

"Such a perfect, delicate and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline. Without it, there was the dome without the lantern; with it, the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogeneous, in that the vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it amounted only to unity." (p. 20)

The fact is, that in her unequal struggle with Egdon's massive indifference, Eustacia attains the impressiveness that she visualizes in

herself; the grim monotony of the heath provokes her into indulging her illusions with a boldness that would be melodramatic if it were not for her innate dignity. So complete is her involvement that such terms as illusion and reality become irrelevant and meaningless. Mention has been made above of the possible irony of Hardy's descriptions of Eustacia - their exotic richness reflecting the romantic vision of a nineteen-year-old girl. Impassive Egdon allows such fantasies to blossom, since it offers to the 'urban' character no alternative reality to inhibit the personal. So Eustacia abandons herself to her dreams, recruiting Wildeve, and then Clym as the leading men in the drama of her life.

"To be loved to madness - such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular loves." (p. 77)

This is the proof of Eustacia's 'urbanness' - the fact that the stimulus behind her actions is essentially conceptual, rather than experiential; like Clym, she pursues an abstract Cause, that transforms reality into shadows on the walls of her mind. Playing the star-role means that Eustacia has nothing to fear from the supporting cast of people about her, nor from the setting - but only from herself. The similarity with Sergeant Troy in Far From the Madding Crowd is clear; he too is a character dedicated to an image, yet who lacks the self-knowledge to transcend it. Just as he must blame a cruel Fate for his own shortcomings, so Eustacia also looks outward when the fault lies within.

"She could show a most reproachful look at times, but it was directed less against human beings than against certain creatures of her mind, the chief of these being Destiny, through whose interference she dimly fancied it arose that love alighted only on gliding youth - that any love she might win would sink simultaneously with the sand in the glass." (p. 77)

Such descriptions imply that Eustacia is indeed an unconventional person, a woman of sophisticated and hedonistic convictions. And yet Hardy apparently comes close to contradicting himself, for he subsequently tells us that Eustacia ". . . had advanced to the secret recesses of sensuousness, yet had hardly crossed the threshold of conventionality." (p. 103) The obvious conclusion is that Hardy is conveying to us the vivid life of Eustacia's mind, as she releases her sense of frustration through an extravagant imagination. Her basic immaturity is revealed in her dream about the newly-arrived Clym, in which he appears as a knight in shining armour, to rescue the damsel in distress. (Although there are also intimations of tragedy in the dive into a heath-pool).

Thus the reality of marriage inevitably brings the shock of disillusionment - and yet it is now that her innate strength of character helps her retain her dignity. The dreams of Paris are squashed by other dreams, and she is again exposed to the grim indifference of Egdon - but now there is a double bond. The temporary escape she makes with Wildeve at the village dance is enough to remind her of old yearnings. ("Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been

steeped in arctic fridity by comparison with the tropical sensations here." (p. 268) - and the tragic consequences of Mrs. Yeobright's death serve to rekindle in more forceful terms her dramatic sense of aloneness. ("She had used to think of the heath alone as an uncongenial spot to be in; she felt it now of the whole world. . . ." (p. 355))

In fleeing the heath, Eustacia is fleeing herself - and thus tragedy ensues. Her return to illusion is denied, which is, in some respects at least, a more satisfactory conclusion than Clym's futile continuance. Yet through all human fret the heath prevails, offering its solidity to those who will accept it for what it is - ". . . a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity." (p. 12)

FOOTNOTES

1. There is an aspect to Gabriel's observation that Hardy may not have realised; one may question whether it is psychologically consistent for Gabriel to conceptualize the scene in this way - whether the startling images do not in fact imply an intellectual detachment foreign to Gabriel's nature.
2. D. H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy,' Selected Literary Criticism(New York, 1956) p. 172.
3. Brown, op. cit., pp.57-8.
4. Wing refers to Venn's ". . . long-suffering passivity. . ." (op. cit., p.56), Brown considers that ". . . chiefly we feel in Venn those qualities of passive firmness, self-denying fidelity, and patient watchfulness, that Hardy values so much. . ." (op. cit., p. 58) - and Guerard labels Diggory a 'spectator' (op. cit., p. 116)
5. Wing, op. cit., p. 56.
6. Diggory regains this 'mystique' by undertaking a radical change of role; by assuming the strangeness of a reddleman, he reveals a decisiveness and individuality that were undoubtedly latent beneath his more conventionally stolid role as a dairyman.
7. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 172
8. Fromm, op. cit., p. 51
9. Lawrence, op. cit., pp.171-2
10. Wing considers that the heath ". . . is overdone in its "tragic possibility," in its evocation as a protagonist in this dark love-story. A heath cannot be a player. . ." (op. cit., p. 55) Carpenter remarks that "Hardy quite clearly wanted us to think of the heath as acting as a character in the novel, as a complex symbol of alien and indifferent nature. . . "

(op. cit., p. 92) Yet is it the heath itself, or is it the individual who projects such qualities into what he (or she) perceives?

11. Fromm, op. cit., p. 6.
12. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 173
13. Ibid., p. 171
14. Ibid., p. 175

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTRYSIDE IN DESCENTANT

i) The Mayor of Casterbrudge

Egdon Heath prevails, just as the rural worlds of Mellstock and Weatherbury prevailed before it; and yet each time the price of survival is higher. In The Return of the Native, three people must perish before the challenge has been defeated, and rural equilibrium regained. But does this equilibrium provide a satisfactory conclusion? Can we feel that in Clym's impotent preaching, and in the openly expedient marriage between Thomasin and Diggory Venn, there is adequate recompense for what has gone before? To transcend earlier conflict and catastrophe we must be convinced that what remains is implicitly more enduring and real than what was destroyed; if we lack that belief, then we experience feelings of regret and frustration that arise from an incomplete illusion - we are awoken before the end of the dream.

From the earliest Wessex novels, there has been a growing recognition of the urban influence, the strength of which has forced Hardy into final equivocation, in order to protect the fragility of the rural world. He is torn between maintaining the essence of rural values

and frankly admitting the potency of the urban consciousness. It is for this reason that rural order is restored only through the self-elimination of the urban invaders, rather than through any effective resistance on the part of the rural world.

Although he fears the alienated egocentricity of rational man, Hardy cannot avoid the conclusion that 'natural' man's instinctive sense of belonging places him at a manifest disadvantage. Intellectual detachment permits a freedom of thought and action that is quite foreign to one who is still psychologically in tune with his environment, and therefore unaware of self as a separate entity. Indeed, it is reason's discovery of the self's isolation that necessitates this dynamic competitive thrust, to impose some ephemeral coherence upon the Nothingness that surrounds rational existence. In many ways, The Return of the Native brings these considerations to a head; Hardy implies that the heath is a kind of sombre canvas upon which the 'urban' characters project their personal illusions, annexing their environment as an extension of self. Perception is therefore a reflection of state of mind - and here we encounter new complexities, for we discover that the imaginative strength of Eustacia's vision creates its own vivid reality; only at her death do the two realities meet.

Thus far there has been little direct confrontation in the Wessex novels between rural and urban characters; one interesting aspect of Far From the Madding Crowd was the rarity of contact between

Gabriel Oak and Sergeant Troy. In a very real sense, they inhabited different worlds. The same is true for The Return of the Native, with the exception of the somewhat impersonal feud between Venn and Wildeve which must have seemed, to the latter at least, as something of a bad dream. As we have seen, the separation is psychological; the rural character is instinctively involved with the unceasing process of animal life, whilst his urban counterpart finds in self the justification for living, and thus interprets his existence in more personal terms.¹ Even when Clym Yeobright is reduced to the humble task of furze-cutting, his self-awareness is never far below the surface, telling him who he is, and what he is doing. Rational man has been freed from his environment, only to be trapped within himself.

"The monotony of his occupation soothed him, and was in itself a pleasure. A forced limitation of effort offered a justification of homely courses to an unambitious man, whose conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded. . . ." (p. 259)

This is the closest an 'urban' character has come to losing the sophisticated veneer of civilization - and yet the spiritual distance between Clym and Humphrey, his fellow worker, is immeasurable. For the former, this unrewarding labour is just another kind of veneer, because it is a conscious regression to a more primitive way of life, for which he must excuse himself. By rationalizing his action, he admits its effectiveness, and turns it into an affectation.

Hardy's apparent unwillingness to accept the implications of his own insight brings The Return of the Native to the brink of confusion, as its final inconclusiveness bears witness; we are left with the feeling that each time, the scars of experience become deeper and more crippling, until the denouement appears as a rather harrassed salvage operation, attempting to restore some equanimity to the rural scene. It is a Pyrrhic victory, gained through a somewhat expedient turn of events, and a half-hearted rearguard action, which deflates the work into final anti-climax. Once again, we are brought back to the uneasy balance between the real and the ideal; in The Return of the Native, it appears that Hardy is moving toward a more realistic conception of rural life, far removed from notions of idyllic bliss and contentment. If this is so, then the conclusion represents an evasive retreat that sacrifices logical consistency for emotional satisfaction and security. Rural stability is re-established, but for the last time.

Perhaps it was the memory of this compromising evasiveness that gave birth to The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886). At the very core of the work is a confrontation between rural man and urban man, and by implication, one is tempted to ask, between ideal and real. This is the culmination of the three previous Wessex novels, of the conflict that was implicit even in the bucolic charm of Under the Greenwood Tree. In fact, it might be claimed that this work embodies the clearest, most emphatic statement of Hardy's basic theme, upon which subsequent novels will

only elaborate.

In the country town of Casterbridge we find ourselves one step further away from basic pastoral life, although Hardy goes to some length to point out the peculiar ambivalence of this particular borough:

" . . . Casterbridge was in most respects but the pole, focus or nerve-knot of the surrounding country-life; differing from the many manufacturing towns which are as foreign bodies set down, like boulders on a plain, in a green world with which they have nothing in common. Casterbridge lived by agriculture at one remove further from the fountain-head than the adjoining villages - no more." (p. 65)

It seems as if Hardy is attempting to set up some kind of equidistant middle-ground, upon which rural and urban can meet with no disadvantage to either - and thus we may comprehend Hardy's reluctance to admit the fact that Casterbridge is essentially urban in nature. For now the question must arise as to who exactly is the invader? Who can be said to 'belong' to such an environment? Must we now consider rural man as the alien, wholly unequipped to survive within such a context, like a fish out of water? In addition, this possibility stresses the contrary risk that influenced Hardy to some extent in The Return of the Native; that in his search for a rural personality strong enough to meet the urban challenge, he would be tempted to modify rural characteristics so radically as to make them ultimately unrecognizable.

After the practical experiment of the earlier novels, Casterbridge can only appear as the last resort, since it represents the theoretical median between the two opposed life-styles. Hardy has reached the other end of the scale; his constant movement away from the idyllic unreality that characterizes Under the Greenwood Tree has made such a confrontation unavoidable. But now he is faced with the difficult task of creating a rural character who possesses sufficient energy and resilience, not merely to survive, but to actually prosper in this environment. In this light, we may appreciate more fully the significance of Hardy's subtitle, 'A Story of a Man of Character'; if he is to transcend his own limitations, he must do it through sheer force of being.

The decline of rural vitality is succinctly conveyed by the first three chapters, which act as a prologue to the body of the work. The initial mood is one of depression, "a dogged and cynical indifference" (p. 7) that is the result of social upheaval. The urban phenomenon of economic necessity is depriving the rural population of their roots, the source of their vitality. Our first encounter with such change was in Far From the Madding Crowd; in the Preface to that novel, Hardy attributes it to

" . . . the recent supplanting of the class of the stationary cottagers, who carried on the local traditions and humours, by a population of more or less migratory labourers, which

has led to the break of continuity of local history, more fatal than any other thing to the preservation of legend, folk-lore, close inter-social relations, and eccentric individualities. For these the indispensable conditions of existence are attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation."

If the people are transitory, then their villages also must reflect this new instability. As the wanderers discover, the village of Weydon-Priors is no exception. Where there is no work, there can be no prosperity.

"Pulling down is more the nater of Weydon. There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this; and the folk nowhere to go - no, not so much as a thatched hurdle; that's the way o' Weydon-Priors". (p. 9)

Thus it is quite in keeping with this obsolete setting that the itinerant hay-trusser and his family should find themselves in a furmity booth at the village fair; Hardy surely intends this anachronistic rural trade to fulfil much the same symbolic function as the reddle-trade in The Return of the Native. The difference is that ancient customs now require some additional stimulus to maintain their existence, as the newcomer ". . . with the instinct of a perverse character. . ." (p. 11) is quick to discover. Indeed, it is this corruption of rural openness that initiates the crisis from which subsequent events are generated. The oppressive atmosphere of defeat becomes almost tangible when the drunken trusser takes the reckless step of selling his wife; the mood of

those present evinces the unconcern that comes of spiritual hopelessness and impotency, although the transaction itself causes some surprise. The whole scene is emblematic of the growing estrangement between rural man and his environment - paradoxically, it is the loss of this distinctive sense of 'belonging' that is now regarded as the means of survival, idealism giving way to realism.

"The difference between the peacefulness of inferior nature and the wilful hostilities of mankind was very apparent at this place. In contrast with the harshness of the act just ended within the tent was the sight of several horses crossing their necks and rubbing each other lovingly as they waited in patience to be harnessed for the homeward journey." (p.18)

When we place this interpretation of rural consciousness between the instinctive involvement exemplified in Under the Greenwood Tree on the one hand, and the rational detachment of all urban characters on the other, the inference is obvious; Hardy has been drawn inexorably toward the dominant force, the only defence being to adapt urban qualities within the rural frame.

The steady decline of rural life is emphasised when Hardy shows us the same fair years later; fresh from the first encounter, we are able to juxtapose the two scenes.

"The new periodical great markets of neighbouring towns were beginning to interfere seriously with the trade carried on here for centuries. The pens for sheep, the tie-ropes for horses, were about half as long as they had been. The stalls of tailors, hosiers, coopers, linen-

drapers, and other such trades had almost disappeared, and the vehicles were far less numerous." (p.24)

On the more personal level, there is the furnity woman, whose manifest loss of prosperity provides a graphic illustration of an out-dated way of life ("Ma'am, you'd hardly believe that I was once the owner of a great pavilion-tent that was the attraction of the fair. . .") (p.27)).

Thus it is in order to escape this enervated condition of disintegration that Hardy turns to the town of Casterbridge, in the hope of finding some more solid basis for survival. We have already noted the insistence upon the 'intermediary' position of Casterbridge, since its existence depends largely upon the surrounding country-side, and yet the two entities are essentially separate. Hardy tells us that "Country and town met at a mathematical line," (p. 32) but it is not simply a physical division - it is a social and psychological division as well.

At this point we may detect a conflict between Hardy's deliberate reiteration of the rural aspects of the town's character, and his intuitive awareness that he was dealing with a very different social phenomenon, one that drew its original life-blood from the veins of rural vitality. Despite the town's picturesque appearance, the spirit of Casterbridge is in fundamental opposition to its setting; it represents a fact, a psychological antithesis.

Nowhere is the corrupting influence more apparent than amongst the local inhabitants. In 'The Return of the Native', there was a fading of rustic colour and energy - here is introduced an element of debasement, where stoical resignation has degenerated into the cynicism of despair; these people are caught in the limbo that exists between two different ways of life. The implicit effect of the urban environment is to make them aware of their own uprootedness, which adds an edge of bitterness to their traditional folk-wisdom; it is ironic that these inhabitants of Casterbridge have acquired a measure of self-awareness only to comprehend their own disillusionment within the urban context. They may live a more comfortable life than their Egdon counterparts, but they are cut off from the instinctive life of the earth, from which they have grown. The general discontent finds voice in response to the sentimental ballads sung by a Scottish newcomer, Donald Farfrae:

"'Danged if our country down here is worth singing about like that! . . . when you take away from among us the fools and the rogues, and the lammigers, and the wanton hussies, and the slatterns, and such like, there's cust few to ornament a song with in Casterbridge, or the country round'." (p. 56)

In tacitly accepting the criteria of another way of life, the erstwhile rustic community lose the dignity that accompanies independence; it becomes a vicious circle, for the more they are assimilated into the urban system, the less respect they can have for their own individuality.

There is a bitter comprehensiveness to Christopher Coney's confession that "... we be bruckle folk here - the best o' us hardly honest sometimes, what with hard winters, and so many mouths to fill, and God a' mighty sending his little taties so terrible small to fill 'em with..." (p. 56).

Although they have been effectively detached from their natural environment, their behaviour and attitudes still attest to their rural origins. They almost have the air of an alien community, banded together for mutual companionship and security, in a hostile world. At times, however, the gatherings at the Three Mariners have a faint echo of the memorable alehouses of Far From the Madding Crowd, and discussion of current Casterbridge events occasionally excites colourful remembrance of happier days. It is surely not without significance that one such reminiscence should recall the carefree world of Under the Greenwood Tree, in contrast to present tribulations:

" 'And dostn't mind how mother would sing, Christopher?' continued Mrs. Cuxson, kindling at the retrospection; 'and how we went with her to the party at Mellstock, do ye mind - at old Dame Ledlow's, farmer Shiner's aunt, do ye mind? - she we used to call Toad-skin, because her face were so yellor and freckled, do ye mind?' " (p. 88)

And so the realization dawns that the rural community is living in the past, having recourse to memories to replace the emptiness of the present. Their dialectal joviality has in a sense become an escapemechanism, creating the momentary illusion of a vanished way of life.

The changing patterns of life that Casterbridge exemplifies has a darker side, embracing those who for some reason fail to make the transition. In the well-defined area of Mixen Lane we may perceive the reality of urban domination, that blindly attempts to impose its own abstract rationality upon people who are psychologically ill-equipped to receive it - and who must therefore become social outcasts instead.

"It was the hiding-place of those who were in distress, and in debt, and trouble of every kind. Farm-labourers and other peasants, who combined a little poaching with their farming, and a little brawling and bibbing with their poaching, found themselves sooner or later in Mixen Lane. Rural mechanics too idle to mechanize, rural servants too rebellious to serve, drifted or were forced into Mixen Lane."
(p. 254)

Yet there is a suspicion of sympathy in Hardy's description - a feeling that there is still a raw vigour pulsing here in jaunty defiance of impersonal Authority. Along with the more squalid aspects of the district ("Much that was sad, much that was low, some things that were baneful, could be seen in Mixen Lane..." (p. 255)), there comes a lighter touch, which suggests that an earthy vitality still remains, the more exuberant for being outside the moulds of social convention. The ambivalence of Hardy's attitude toward these people reflects the core of his own uncertainty; whilst reason tells him that the situation is one of moral degradation, he cannot conceal an intuitive respect for the primitive integrity of their lives, that renders such abstract judgements

quite irrelevant. The word does not convey the experience; the intellectual concept does not allow for the multifariousness of human existence.

The 'mind' of Casterbridge controls the 'gut' of Mixen Lane, "Yet this mildewed leaf in the sturdy and flourishing Casterbridge plant lay close to the open country. . ." (p.255)

This is the point; the rural consciousness simply cannot relate to the urban environment, for although transition has brought some self-awareness, it only serves to emphasise helplessness. They are the victims of Progress, as Hardy is well aware:

"Under some of the roofs abode pure and virtuous souls whose presence there was due to the iron hand of necessity, and to that alone. Families from decayed villages. . . whose roof-trees had fallen for some reason or other, compelling them to quit the rural spot that had been their home for generations - came here, unless they chose to lie under a hedge by the wayside." (p.256)

Perhaps the most explicit evidence of radical psychological change is revealed in the mocking humour of the skimmity-ride, a practical joke of an unexpectedly vindictive nature. The brain-child of the habitués of 'Peter's Finger', (which, like other Hardy inns, exudes so much of the communal temper), its elaborate preparation suggests a deep-seated store of resentment that we have not met before. Clearly, the urban context has brought rural shortcomings to light, which inevitably breeds a feeling of opposition, and a subsequent desire for retaliation.

The natural targets for such action are those characters who in some way represent the urban ideals that have brought about rural collapse.

Behind the humour of the skimmity-ride is an instinctive fear, that resolves itself in the flamboyant device of effigy; by reducing their chosen rivals to 'straw-men', they are able to control their own sense of vulnerability, by reassuring themselves of the basic human vulnerability of those who appear more powerful. Their reprisal is tragically effective, since it results in the death of one of the persons thus derided - but the effect is merely to underline the irresponsible absurdity of the skimmity-ride. It is in itself a mockery of spontaneous rural gaiety, in the shape of maypole dances, club walks, and so forth; there is a nightmarish unreality to the procession - Hardy refers to it as a "Daemonic Sabbath" (p. 279) - that is the total antithesis of rural existence. The unpleasantness that underlines the superficial merriment of the skimmity-ride clearly demonstrates the corruption of the rural spirit; rural custom has acquired the bitter edge of social discontent that plays an undeniable part within the Casterbridge community. These men and women of cunning and furtiveness are indeed a far cry from the rustic openness of previous Wessex communities.

In her complete separation from the well-springs of being, Lucetta Templeman evinces a new aspect of the urban character - a helplessness that results in her death. Hardy makes it very explicit that she does not belong, either to Casterbridge or any other place; she

moves over the surface of life, indulging her immediate fancy. Her complete deracination is implied in her background - she stems from Jersey, where ". . . they speak French on one side of the street and English on the other, and a mixed tongue in the middle of the road. . . ." (p. 53). Partly for exotic effect, no doubt; but there is also an impression of hereditary isolation. The very 'urbaness' of her nature is her downfall: hitherto encircled by the bounds of social convention, her longing for sensation is amply fulfilled by the powerful physicality of Michael Henchard. She is overwhelmed by the experience of passion, as subsequent events demonstrate, Henchard's own reluctance acting as a spur (she admits in a letter to the latter that ". . . you really did set before me in your grim way the fact of there being a certain risk in intimacy with you. . ." (p. 119)).

When Lucetta re-enters the picture, however, circumstances have changed. The passage of time has eliminated the sense of emotional adventure, the exciting impact of an unknown sensation - and so her motives for continuing the relationship may be detected in her rational desire for social respectability. Indeed, she regards the alliance almost as a business transaction; in keeping with her urban nature, she makes use of her accession to fortune as the main point in her favour. All thought of romance seems to have been forgotten.

"With strong social reasons on her side why their marriage should take place there had ceased to be any worldly reason on his why it should be postponed, since she had succeeded to fortune". (p.156)

Significantly, this rather materialistic approach is not lost on Henchard, who is suitably impressed by her qualifications. The rural character has clearly absorbed some urban circumspection, in its progress.

At the point of concluding the marriage-bargain, Lucetta meets Donald Farfrae - and immediately there is a communion of urban souls. Both are quick to perceive the other's lonely alienation, and it is only a short step to discover mutual desire and ambitions. In fact, their first conversation is conducted almost entirely in commercial terms, Farfrae delicately hinting his fascination by delaying a business transaction (" 'I like staying; but I fear I must go! ', he said. 'Business ought not to be neglected, ought it?' " (p.164)). Yet his systematic dedication to the making of money is far more comprehensible to Lucetta than the instinctive energy of Henchard, and hence expediency gives way, somewhat inopportunately, to a more substantial emotion. This is one of the numerous instances in The Mayor of Casterbridge where our sympathies are divided; we can understand Lucetta's fear of Henchard's aggressiveness, and yet we cannot accept her moral weakness in secretly marrying her more conventional suitor, Donald Farfrae. Despite Lucetta's strong rationalizations of her action, we find ourselves siding with Henchard in the emotional warmth of his indignation. The open spontaneity of his reactions provide a contrast to Lucetta's guilty desire to justify her behaviour.

The friendship between Lucetta and Elizabeth-Jane, Henchard's 'daughter', offers a further indication of change in the rural personality (although we must remember that her real rather is, in fact, a sailor.) From the moment when she urges her mother not to speak to the ancient firmity-woman, at the Weydon-Priors fair - ("... it isn't respectable.. " ') (p. 26) - we begin to form an image of a young woman very conscious of class distinction and the niceties of conventional behaviour. Yet these peculiarly urban characteristics are the manifestation of her desire to improve her lot; she has the the self-awareness to recognise the privations of her rural situation.

"The desire - sober and repressed - of Elizabeth-Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear, and to understand. How could she become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute - 'better' as she termed it - this was her constant enquiry of her mother... " (p. 30)

Here are the first signs of rebellion against rural conservatism, of youth searching for some kind of advancement beyond the rural environment - a theme that Hardy will investigate with depressing thoroughness, in Jude the Obscure.

So single-minded is Elizabeth-Jane's pursuit of respectability that she comes close to being an outright prude. Her actions are characterised by a self-denial that is somehow irritating, in all its pristine virtue. It is in one of these sacrificial moments that she

encounters Donald Farfrae - and the similarity of their attitudes toward life is ample proof of the former's distance from rural consciousness.

"She admired the serious light in which he looked at serious things. He had seen no jest in ambiguities and roguery, as the Casterbridge toss-pots had done; and rightly not - there was none. She disliked those wretched humours of Christopher Coney and his tribe; and he did not appreciate them. He seemed to feel exactly as she felt about life and its surroundings - that they were a tragical rather than a comical thing: that though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety were interludes, and no part of the actual drama."
(p. 59)

This is the point; both of these characters interpret life through the cold light of reason, unrelieved by any tincture of irrational emotion, which is the indulgence of foolish and reckless people. Hardy tells us that Elizabeth-Jane has categorical control over her personality, so that no frivolous sensation can disturb the equanimity of her existence.

"She felt none of those ups and downs of spirit which beset so many people without cause; ... never a gloom in Elizabeth-Jane's soul but she well knew how it came there; and her present cheerfulness was fairly proportionate to her solid guarantees for the same". (p. 90)

When Henchard discovers the truth about her parentage, however, his subsequent behaviour revives our sympathy for Elizabeth-Jane. His instinctive reaction against her is inconsiderate and irresponsible, and exhibits an unattractive pettiness that is part of his

contradictory nature; by contrast, Elizabeth-Jane appears touchingly anxious to please the man she now believes to be her father, and her occasional lapses of gentility afford her feminine vulnerability. But the strain of the relationship eventually drives her to the home of Lucetta, who possesses the additional attraction of being both sophisticated and mysterious - in a word, she evinces the 'urbanness' that Elizabeth-Jane wishes to acquire for herself. In effect, the two women provide an interesting juxtaposition; Lucetta vain, inconsistent, rather empty, Elizabeth-Jane ingenuous, but sincere and thoughtful. But it is not until Lucetta's indiscreet marriage comes to light that we see the old inflexibility of Elizabeth-Jane's character; her obsession with respectability cannot entertain this irregularity. ("Her craving for correctness of procedure was, indeed, almost vicious..." (p.216))

This tough streak may be seen in her return to the now humiliated Henchard. On the surface, it appears to be a gesture of compassion - and yet there is a suggestion of psychological dominance that casts a shadow over her motivation. One may be forgiven for suspecting that Elizabeth-Jane is denying Henchard his masculinity, by treating him as a helpless child. Hardy informs us that "She had her own way in everything now. In going and coming, in buying and selling, her word was law." (p.302)

Ultimately, her rational assessment of events causes her to withdraw her love from her passionate father, to the extent of

treating him like a stranger. In their final interview, Reason comes face to face with Feeling, and their total separation breeds tragedy. Henchard cannot understand her calculated manipulation of emotion, since feeling constitutes so integral a part of his being; on the other hand, Elizabeth-Jane cannot conceive of love as an irrational force, transcending the logic of 'normal' behaviour. Once again, her "reasonableness" controls the situation, weighs the pros and cons of Henchard's appeal, and then rejects him. Like Clym Yeobright before her, Elizabeth-Jane is enclosed in her own narrow self ("My Mind to me a Kingdom is"), which acknowledges the validity of no existence beyond her own. There can be only one interpretation of life, and whatever fails to fit into that rigid, rational conception must be dismissed as meaningless and harmful. Confronted by her cool detachment, Henchard is able to regain some of his old dignity and stature, and leave her to her own world. There is an irony in the rather pedestrian philosophy that concludes the work, as we return to the circumscribed existence that goes on, indeed emanates, from Elizabeth-Jane's head.

"As the lively and sparkling emotions of her early married life cohered into an equable serenity, the finer movements of her nature found scope in discovering to the narrow-lived ones around her the secret (as she had once learnt it) of making limited opportunities endurable;" (p. 333)

Of Susan Henchard there is little to be said. Our first impression is one of helplessness in the face of Henchard's obstinate perversity, although she responds to his insult with a flash of defiance that denotes a certain toughness of character. Her reappearance in Casterbridge, and subsequent remarriage with Henchard, give substance to this image of a weak and submissive exterior concealing a persistent streak of determination. We may perceive in her actions the element of calculation that her daughter has so undeniably inherited, and which contrasts so completely with Henchard's open spontaneity. If this is so, then her revelation of Elizabeth-Jane's true father becomes a long-awaited act of revenge, despite the weakness of its phrasing.

The most extreme conflict between the forces of Reason and Feeling is revealed in the relationship between Donald Farfrae, the model of urban efficiency and self-control, and Michael Henchard, a man who embodies all the raw passion and energy of instinctive, animal life. (John Holloway remarks of Henchard that "... his whole nature, good or bad, is centred upon a deep source of vital energy. The rich stream of life still issues from life's traditional order. . . ³). We return to the fundamental contrast between detachment and involvement, mind and body - and our sympathies remain so equally divided throughout the book that we may suspect a profound uncertainty in Hardy's mind; intellect asserts the efficacy of rational thought as a life- guide, but intuition declares the richness of sensuous life, the vividness of a total sense of being.

As we have seen, the faculty of reason is paradoxically the means both of recognizing, and dealing with human alienation; it provides an artificial reality that conceals the Nothingness that lies behind. Yet, like all imitations, such a 'reality' must appear larger than life, in order to be convincing - and it is this element of over-statement that tells us much about Farfrae, when he entertains the customers of the 'Three Mariners'. The fact is, that Farfrae can detach himself emotionally as well as intellectually; his feeling is valid only for the moment of experience, then it is forgotten. In singing of his homeland, he can feel the surge of patriotic pride and longing for the course of the song, and then turns off the sentiment like a tap. He tells Elizabeth-Jane later that: "... it's well you feel a song for a few minutes, and your eyes they get quite tearful; but you finish it, and for all you felt you don't mind it or think of it again for a long while. Oh no, I don't want to go back!" (p. 97)

The local people have no conception of such mental agility, and therefore accept the feeling of the songs at face-value - which inevitably causes some confusion, voiced by Christopher Coney: "'Be dazed, if I loved my country half as well as the young feller do, I'd live by cleaning my neighbours pigsties afore I'd go away!" (p. 56-7). Donald Davidson points out the significance of Farfrae's singing with considerable perception:

"(Farfrae's) nostalgia is meaningless, or has only momentary genuineness. It is not an expression of the whole man, but only a superficial adornment of the dominant principle of calculation. The efficiency of Farfrae as

calculator requires that his singing and dancing be kept distinct from his calculation; they can never really be "meant." ⁴

Henchard is psychologically incapable of such premeditated behaviour; whatever he does receives a total commitment, that absorbs the whole of his enormous energy. In this way, he has climbed from hay-trusser to mayor of Casterbridge, applying in more constructive manner the same relentless determination that drove him to sell his wife at Weydon-Priors fair. It is a vigour that stems from the blind centre of his being, thus lacking the restraint that reason might place upon it; Henchard offers himself impulsively, without thought of consequence, relying upon his instinctive judgment alone. His attraction to Farfrae is an excellent example of how Henchard can sweep incompatibilities brusquely aside - although he recognizes Farfrae's value as a manager, it is the desire for his friendship that stimulates his action. He tells Farfrae that

"... it isn't all selfishness that makes me press 'ee; for my business is not quite so scientific as to require an intellect entirely out of the common. Others would do for the place without doubt. Some selfishness perhaps there is, but there is more; it isn't for me to repeat what. Come bide with me - and name your own terms. I'll agree to 'em willingly and 'ithout a word of gainsaying; for hang it, Farfrae, I like thee well!'" (p. 68)

The darker side to such unpredicable single-mindedness is the unwillingness to consider any other eventuality - in other words, the subservience of reason to intuition. Having persuaded Farfrae to remain, Henchard impatiently rebuffs the man who had applied for the post through more conventional channels - and we find ourselves condemning his behaviour as unreasonable, which is precisely the point. Henchard is an unreasonable man.

The limitations of the mayor's rural nature are revealed in the aggressive warmth of his friendship, which carried Farfrae along by its own impetus. Engrossed in his own being, he has no notion that Farfrae views the relationship from an entirely different angle. Henchard's heartiness conceals the other's reserve - even takes advantage of it, to give the more, and, in a subtle sense, increase the domination. The point is, that Henchard has no real awareness of Farfrae as a separate individual; it is only when the latter begins to assert his own existence that Henchard is brought up in his tracks, and his irrational feeling of betrayal turns affection into hatred.

Thus it is not long before a confrontation occurs, that demonstrates the irreconcilable distance between the two men, since it contrasts the heat of Henchard's impetuosity with the coolness of Farfrae's reasonableness. The urban context of Casterbridge begins to play a role, as we realise that Henchard's forceful independence is no match for his manager's more equable and prudent temper. Farfrae's urban detachment allows him to ingratiate himself by consciously adapting to suit the immediate situation; Henchard, on the other hand, can only be

his inflexible self - people must take him as he is, for he will be no other. Here is the imbalance in their relationship; in the typical rush of his feelings, Henchard has given his all to the younger man, which turns any kind of assertiveness on the part of Farfrae into a personal attack and mortification.

"On this account Henchard's manner towards Farfrae insensibly became more reserved. He was courteous - too courteous - and Farfrae was quite surprised at the good breeding which now for the first time showed itself among the qualities of a man he had hitherto thought undisciplined, if warm and sincere..." (p.105)

In these circumstances, there is a tragic inevitability about the growing division between the two men. When they enter into direct competition, Farfrae's systematic efficiency is wholly compatible with the urban environment, and cannot fail to overcome the impatient carelessness of Henchard's business methods.

"It was, in some degree, Northern insight matched against Southern doggedness - the dirk against the cudgel - and Henchard's weapon was one which, if it did not deal ruin at the first or second stroke, left him afterwards well-nigh at his antagonist's mercy" (p.118)

The rural "rule-o'-thumb sort of man" (p. 52) is becoming a figure of the past. More and more do we come to sense Henchard's psychological isolation - and hence it comes as no surprise when he is dealt the double blow of losing both 'daughter' and former mistress to the more ethereal, sophisticated charm of the Scotsman. Passion has

been superceded; these three persons conceive of a relationship in utilitarian terms, almost as a business contract. Farfrae's coldness becomes particularly apparent here, as we watch mere expediency draw him toward Elizabeth-Jane; ("... who so pleasing, thrifty and satisfactory in every way as Elizabeth-Jane?" (p.159)) - and we have already noted the peculiar nature of the subsequent romance between Farfrae and Lucetta Templeman.

In Farfrae's advocacy of mechanical innovation, and in Henchard's superstitious reliance upon a weather prophet for advice, Hardy presents two significant episodes that exemplify the rural transformation. The principle of calculation remains supreme; Henchard's physical strength and vitality are no longer to his advantage, since life in Casterbridge is acquiring an urban abstractness that is reflected in Farfrae's prosperous progress. As Davidson puts it, "... the tragedy of Henchard is the tragedy of a truly masculine man in collision with forces that turn the traditional masculine virtues into liabilities..."⁵

With respect to Henchard's interview with the local seer, however, there is an interesting consequence, that suggests a new distrust of rural tradition. The fact is, that Henchard ultimately loses confidence in the prediction he is given, with disastrous effect upon his business. It seems as if rural man is himself admitting that his way of life is no longer valid.

Like an Angel of Doom, the old furmity-woman comes out of the past (the rural past, it might' be added), to point an accusing finger at the mayor, and bring his misfortunes to a climax. Henchard's star has burnt itself out, for Casterbridge now lives by a new morality, that cannot countenance such primitive and unreasonable misdeeds as the selling of a wife.

Farfrae's methodical caution has finally eclipsed the undisciplined energy of the older man, being manifestly more suited to the abstract complexity of urban life. The basic difference of approach is pointed out by the unfortunate Abel Whittle, the subject of an early "contretemps" between Henchard and Farfrae, who now works for Farfrae.

" '... We work harder, but we bain't made afeard now... No busting out, no slamming of doors, no meddling with yer eternal soul and all that; and though 'tis a shilling a week less I'm the richer man; for what's all the world if yer mind is always in a larry... "
(p. 222)

More work for less pay - Farfrae's reasonableness clearly has a sound motive!

Blow after blow rains upon Henchard's unprotected head; as Farfrae's fortunes rise, first as merchant, then as mayor, Henchard suffers public disgrace and poverty. At last his frustration demands release in physical combat with his arch-rival, as if this is the only way in which Henchard can now communicate his feelings. Having once again asserted his power over Farfrae, the rest is as nothing - " 'God is my witness that no

man ever loved another as I did thee at one time. . . . And now - though I came here to kill 'ee, I cannot hurt thee" (p. 274).

After the nemesis of Newson's return, Henchard is as a "netted lion" (p. 302), restrained by the apprehension of discovery. To avoid the inevitable he resumes his old occupation of hay-making, thus bringing the wheel full circle. Yet even in these bitter straits, his instinctive warmth of feeling still remains. His own emotions are so sudden and vivid, that he has no conception of the strength of rational memory. His rural involvement means that he lives in the present, for the present; past and future have little meaning. Unfortunately, this is not true for Elizabeth-Jane.

It is fitting, therefore, that Henchard dies in the company of one of his own kind, whose unthinking assistance transcends previous abuse and ill-treatment, and attains the essence of humanity. In this sense, Abel Whittle provides a telling foil to the unfeeling aloofness of Donald Farfrae, whose rational perception denies any total sense of being.

" 'Then 'a said "Whittle, what do ye follow me for when I've told ye to go back all these times?" And I said, "Because, sir, I see things be bad with 'ee, and ye wer kind-like to mother if ye were rough to me, and I would fain be kind-like to you'. " (p. 332)

John Holloway notes the rural core of Henchard's nature very emphatically: "Henchard's character. . . . is that of a beast; in the true, not the townee, sense of that word." His immense natural energy, his simplicity, having no skill of any kind save that of hay-making, and his

liability to enslavement above all through a disabling, yearning, dog-like need for human affection, all these features of his nature are tellingly relevant. Henchard is not, of course, simply an animal. Far from it. At no point does metaphor become literal truth... " ⁶

The conclusion of The Mayor of Casterbridge is thus a symbolic defeat for the rural world; the urban consciousness has flourished within the essentially favourable environment of Casterbridge, and slowly turned rural vitality into an anachronism. Throughout the work, our response has been uncomfortably ambivalent, as our sympathies have wavered from one side to the other. Although we are affected by the dignity of Henchard's end, we cannot forget that much of his suffering was of his own making; although we are a little disgusted by the insipidity of Farfrae and Elizabeth-Jane, we can by no means discount entirely their motivation - it is too familiar for that. We are offered a choice between the animal exuberance of Michael Henchard, who lives out the Blakean proverb that "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough," ⁷ and the rational restraint of Farfrae; despite his obvious sympathies, Hardy is too honest to retreat from his insight.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Holloway, in The Victorian Sage (London, 1953) remarks that "(Hardy's) whole concept of good and bad follows these lines, and is perfectly simple; people are to be admired as they have continuity with nature more or less completely, and those when he stresses as in a false track in life are those who lost it, and pursue some private self-generated dream instead..." (p.283)
2. Hardy, Preface to Far from the Madding Crowd, p.v.
3. John Holloway, The Charted Mirror (New York, 1962) p. 97
4. Donald Davidson, Still Rebels, Still Yankees (Baton Rouge, 1957)
p.74
5. Ibid., p. 79
6. Holloway, The Charted Mirror, p. 103
7. Blake, "Proverbs of Heaven and Hell", p. 152

ii) The Woodlanders

The Woodlanders (1887) appears to be a work of conscience, induced by the conclusiveness of rural defeat in The Mayor of Casterbridge. Not only did the latter work bring the search for compromise to a final halt, but it also cast a shadow of doubt over the earlier novels; in the light of Henchard's fall from grace, their re-establishment of rural tranquility is reduced to mere wishful thinking. Our suspicions that Hardy was struggling against his own intuition have proved well-founded; artistic integrity has given way to the instinctive desire for security.

In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Hardy reached a turning-point for the first time, his feelings were overruled by the deep conviction of his insight. So tight is Hardy's control in this work, that the end is implicit in the beginning; the course of events is infused with a tense, driving inevitability. Following this achievement, we may regard The Woodlanders as an attempt to re-interpret rural life, to go back to old scenes with a new awareness.¹ In this respect, its significance is relative to such a work as Far From the Madding Crowd, where fantasy tends to govern reality.

From the beginning, we sense the dank smell of stagnancy. Whilst Weatherbury, with all its colour and vitality, gave the impression of being the centre of the world, Little Hintock is a world apart. Indeed, our first introduction is from the outside, which in itself suggests that an alien consciousness prevails in the author's mind.

"It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises and results in inferences wildly imaginative. . . ." (p. 10)

Rural isolation has become a weakness, rather than a source of security; the illusion of stability is exploded at the moment a more powerful reality intrudes upon the scene. Life in Little Hinstock is static, because there is no rejuvenating impetus for change; even the core of tradition has lost its relevance, and turned the central support of pastoral life into a hollow anachronism.

With The Woodlanders, a pattern begins to manifest itself, that draws the whole Wessex canon into a coherent whole. Thus far, we have traced within each individual novel the conflict between rural involvement and urban detachment, and seen how the latter quality has gained predominance. In The Woodlanders, it becomes obvious that this same process has occurred within Hardy's own consciousness, and had a profound influence on the development of his vision. Clearly, the early novels are informed with an emotional involvement, which is slowly curbed, and ultimately overcome, in the crucial confrontation of The mayor of Casterbridge. The transition is completed in The Woodlanders, and explains the more realistic mood; Hardy is not looking at the countryside through the detached, rational awareness of his own being. Not surprisingly, it is a work of disillusionment; at times, it seems as if Hardy is intent upon paying in full measure for his earlier escapism, particularly in the deliberate cynicism of the conclusion.

Once again, we encounter a heroine who returns to the rural environment with the advantage of an urban education. Like Fancy and Bathsheba before her, Grace Melbury is faced with a choice between suitors who represent wholly different ways of life. The rustic hero, Giles Winterborne, is the natural successor to Gabriel Oak; but now the traditional rural virtues of patience and fortitude have been transformed into a stultifying ineffectiveness that drains Giles of his masculinity. Throughout the work he is fettered by his involvement in a way of life that has lost its validity. He first appears to Grace as a somewhat crude figure from the past, whose ignorance of social conventions is embarrassingly obvious. Their first meeting symbolises their new incompatibility, as Giles is almost literally 'rooted' to the spot, and cannot move to meet Grace - she must come to him.

"Winterborne, being fixed to the spot by his apple-tree, could not advance to meet her; he held out his spare hand with his hat in it, and with some embarrassment beheld her coming on tip-toe through the mud to the middle of the square where he stood" (p. 40)

The reality of Giles' life is nullified by the abstract demands of urban existence. His attempts at the social graces are doomed to failure, because they impose an artificial restraint that is a complete contradiction to rural spontaneity - a contrast that becomes very clear at the party Giles organizes to celebrate Grace's return. Yet Giles submits

to the dictates of social etiquette, and is paralysed by it. His instinctive humanity is corrupted into weak indecisiveness, to the extent that his affection for Grace becomes a crippling emotion, that cuts him off from his own being. His latent sense of inadequacy is further enhanced by the influence of Grace's class-conscious father, who is convinced of the social superiority that his daughter has acquired.

But Hardy is also concerned to show us the other side of Winterborne's nature - the side that is a part of the world he knows, and of which he is himself a part. Here is Giles' justification for living, the implicit reality of his being.

"He had a marvellous power of making trees grow. Although he would seem to shovel in the earth quite carelessly, there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on; so that the roots took hold of the soil in a few days. When, on the other hand, any of the journeymen planted, although they seemed to go through an identically similar process, one quarter of the trees would die away during the ensuing August." (p. 68)

It is not coincidental that his assistant at these times of assurance should be Marty South, who is manifestly Giles' female counterpart. Yet she too is shackled by the passive acquiescence of her nature; despite her love for Giles, she has nothing to offer him beyond her own self, a spiritual nakedness that is powerfully symbolised in the sale of her hair. The Biblical reference is obvious; just as Samson surrendered the

secret of his strength to the treacherous wills of Delilah, so Marty is compelled to forfeit her femininity to the spectre of economic necessity. It is ironic that she must part with her most prized possession merely to satisfy an urban whim; it demonstrates all too vividly the extent of rural dependence.

Giles' unresponsiveness to Marty's affection adds to the suspicion that there is a growing alienation in his nature. It is almost as if Giles is subconsciously attempting to escape his own existence in his attraction to the more sophisticated Grace. The shell of rural involvement is beginning to crack, letting in the germ of rational awareness to breed the diseases of dissatisfaction and loneliness. Thus he does not come to her in the pride of independence, but in self-conscious subservience; his clumsy endeavours to adopt an urbane manner only serve to widen the division that exists between them.

It is only after Grace's marriage, when Giles has gone back to the familiar security of his old way of life, that he regains a masculine dignity. The organic unity of his life now becomes very apparent to Grace, who has separated herself from the rich sensuousness of rural life through her marriage with the urban Fitzpiers. But even here the sympathy is not complete, for there is an element of nostalgic unreality in her perception of Giles that implies an idealization. We may suspect that it is more the pastoral life that Giles represents, rather than Giles himself, that she regrets losing; her thoughts are a kind of intellectual indulgence, rising out of a frustration at not being able to have her cake and eat it.

"He rose upon her memory as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation; sometimes leafy and smeared with green lichen, as she had seen him amongst the sappy boughs of the plantations: sometimes cider-stained and starred with apple-pips, as she had met him on his return from cider-making in Blackmoor Vale, with his vats and presses beside him". (p.286)

If the reality of Giles' life is rather less idyllic than Grace's idle fancy implies, it nevertheless provides him with a stable base to which he has a sense of commitment - and this is something that Grace herself cannot find. She returns to Little Hintock lacking all sense of direction, and thus receptive to the first ideas that are placed before her. Since Giles is too reticent to be aware of this impressionability, it is her ambitious father who guides her feelings and encourages her rejection of Winterborne. Yet in a sense the battle is already won, before Melbury's intervention, by virtue of Grace's initiation into the rational world outside. This was the essential difficulty with the earlier novels, that their respective heroines were able to re-involve themselves in instinctive rural life, whilst having an awareness of the separateness of rational existence. Despite her feeling for Giles, the match is impossible - a fact that Melbury recognizes, but for the wrong reasons.

In The Mayor of Casterbridge we discovered the importance of respectability in human affairs - in itself an urban quality, since it requires a circumspection that is quite alien to the rural consciousness. Yet urban dominance has become so pervasive that rural characters have found themselves helplessly suspended, like fish out of water, in a world

they can neither understand nor deal with. The edicts of 'reasonable' behaviour, (of which respectability is the social distillation) were responsible for the death of Michael Henchard; they have the same effect upon Giles Winterborne.

As with Gabriel Oak before him, Giles' patient and undemonstrative perseverance proves to be a rock in the heroine's turbulent sea of disillusionment. Unlike his predecessor, however, Giles does not possess the resolution to seize his opportunity. Deferential to the last, he allows himself to be infected with Grace's hesitancy, that reflects so obviously her detachment from physical experience. Even her new perception of Giles is couched in terms that convey a coldly intellectual appraisal, belying the intensity of the moment. It seems too calculated to be real.

"Having discovered by marriage how much that was humanely not great could co-exist with attainments of an exceptional order, there was a revulsion in her sentiments from all that she had formerly clung to in this kind. Honesty, goodness, manliness, tenderness, devotion, for her only existed in their purity now in the breasts of unvarnished men; and here was one who had manifested such towards her from his youth up." (p.227)

Thus their reconciliation is a bitter illusion, both in a social sense and in a personal sense; whilst Grace is quite willing to make use of Giles in her selfish desire to escape her own mistakes, she takes the precaution of shackling him with the chains of respectability, to prevent

any unreasonable impetuosity. Just how effective such chains are is revealed in the impotent futility of Giles' death; two people are, in a sense, deprived of their humanity by abstract conventions, cut off from their physical existence by the tyranny of their minds.

" 'O', she cried in her anguish as she hastily prepared herself to go out; 'how selfishly correct I am always - too, too correct! Can it be that cruel propriety is killing the dearest heart that ever woman clasped to her own! " (p. 322)

The difference between Winterborne and Edred Fitzpiers, his urban rival, is that the latter has a perpetual choice of action that derives from his detached assessment of every situation. Mind so completely dominates his being that it controls his body almost as an instrument; the hidden springs of his motivations make him appear a mysterious and isolated individual, the source of some trepidation amongst the simple and superstitious country-folk. Giles, on the other hand, has no such concealment in his nature; he is explicitly and unavoidably himself, nothing more or less. He has no choice, since he has never acquired the awareness that would enable him to step outside of his own being. As we have seen this is his downfall - particularly when he dimly perceives his own inadequacy. Inhibition changes him into a tame animal, forcing him into a game he does not understand.

Fitzpiers' lack of self-awareness is manifested in a very different way; the unlimited diversity of his intellect has been diffused into many endless paths, for lack of some unifying principle or aim. He uses his

his mind as an escape - Hardy tells us that "... the doctor was not a practical man, except by fits, and much preferred the ideal world to the real, and the discovery of principles to their application..." (p.119). Thus we may interpret Fitzpiers' recoil from the "crude rusticity" of Little Hintock as the impulse of a man whose animal instinct has been largely sublimated. In this respect, he differs from Sergeant Troy, in Far From the Madding Crowd, who retains some contact (however expedient) with the physical aspect of agricultural life.

The psychological separation between Fitzpiers and Winterborne is demonstrated in their discussion of Grace, who has just aroused the former's curiosity. Winterborne simply cannot conceive of the cool intellectuality of the doctor's feeling, which involves the evocation of such distant names as Spinoza and Shelley. After Fitzpiers' weighty philosophical explication of his motives, Winterborne, in all his simplicity, is forced to remark.

"Well, it is what we call being in love down in these parts, whether or no", said Winterborne.

'You are right enough if you admit that I am in love with something in my own head, and no thing in itself outside it at all'. " (p.122)

The impression we begin to form is one of a man for whom physical existence has become an imposition, a man possessing the mental isolation we first discovered in Clym Yoebright. Yet subsequent events go to prove that his academic researches are little more than a sophisticated illusion - as much of an escape from the alienated emptiness of self as was

Troy's philandering, or Farfrae's commercialism. Once again, rationality is compensating for man's loss of contact with his environment.

Fitzpiers' uncommitted detachment reveals itself in his behaviour at the Midsummer Revel, a lingering rural superstition that provides an earthy attraction to the local people. The fact is, that Fitzpiers' separateness allows him to indulge in the sensuousness of the occasion the more freely for being mentally apart; he is able to manipulate the situation to his own satisfaction, which entails seizing the attractive Grace in his arms, and assuaging more basic desires with the willing compliance of a female animal, Suke Damson. This is a very different Fitzpiers to the one who tells Grace that in her "... Nature has at last recovered her lost union with the Idea'...." (p.136)

In fact, his ability of adapt himself to any circumstance is underlined by his knowledge with three women, all of whom represent a different kind of consciousness. As we have noted, Suke Damson exudes rural sensuality, unlimited in the obedience to instinct; at the other extreme in terms of awareness, but not unlike in expression, is Felice Charmond, an urban sophisticate for whom illicit passion is a release from boredom and emptiness. In this respect, her affair with Fitzpiers is a communion of lost souls. ("... 'I think I was born to live and do nothing, nothing, nothing but float about, as we fancy we do sometimes in dreams...' ") (p. 64)

In between these two comes Grace Melbury, naively susceptible to the enigmatic charisma projected by the doctor, and much influenced by her father, who sees every social advantage in Fitzpiers' family background. As Bathsheba is fascinated by Troy's virile assertiveness, symbolized by his sword-play, Grace is likewise drawn by the brilliance of Fitzpiers' mind - Hardy describes it as "... an almost psychic influence..." (p.164) - which further illustrates the role of intellect as a kind of sexual bait, that can be produced as the moment demands. Grace's urban enlightenment has instilled in her a respect for outer appearances, that permits illusion and reality to become hopelessly intermingled; she rises to the bait.

The disillusionment of marriage ensues, and Grace re-discovers the contrasting solidity of rural virtues, embodied in Giles Winterborne; but this time Hardy's insight does not waver. This time the alternative is confronted, that Far From the Madding Crowd carefully avoided - and it is the crux of the novel. Grace has advanced too far from the unity of the rural consciousness ever to return, and therefore her longing must be as for the lost innocence of childhood, which can never be regained. Giles' death takes on an almost sacrificial significance, marking Grace's rebirth into the urban consciousness, which is ultimately the only way to turn.

Her decision is made, revealing itself in the unexpected assuredness of her attitude toward Fitzpiers, whose submissiveness

suggests an innate weakness. Grace symbolically 'castrates' him, in fact, by stripping him of the accoutrements of his learning, which formed a defensive shell against a large and hostile world. Suddenly we realize the extent of Fitzpiers' vulnerability, in his willingness to be dominated.

The mood of The Woodlanders is one of defeat, as the central foundation of rural existence had shown itself as hollow. No longer is the rural world complete in its sense of belonging, of being an integrated part of a greater whole. The pervasive feeling is that of disunity and decay.

"On older trees... huge lobes of fungi grew like lungs. Here, as everywhere, the Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling."
(p. 56)

FOOTNOTES

1. We may detect a parallel in the relationship between Blake's poems of Innocence and Experience.

iii. Tess of the d'Urbervilles

Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891) brings us back to Blake, in that we may discover a remarkable thematic similarity between this work of Hardy's and Blake's poem "Visions of the Daughters of Albion"¹. It seems that Hardy is here trying to counterbalance the gloomy defeatism of The Woodlanders, by a firm restatement of his vision of a world in harmony, where men and Nature exist as one. The novel may thus be regarded as escapist, an emotional retreat from what he knew to be true - and yet we may also interpret it in a more sympathetic light. It may be argued that Tess of the d'Urbervilles represents Hardy's most mature assessment of the conflict that has obsessed him from the beginning; we have come through rural predominance, in Far From the Madding Crowd, to confrontation and subsequent urban victory in The Mayor of Casterbridge, and hence to cynical over-reaction in The Woodlanders. Now, with a full awareness of his theme, Hardy is ready to release his energies into an impassioned and powerful work. Emotion and reason, intuition and intellect become intertwined in Tess; for this reason, the essential unity of Blake's vision may offer us some insight into the conflict of Hardy's writing.

So involved does Hardy become with his rural heroine, in fact, that he is forced to detach himself with a jerk, in a way consciously aimed at satisfying the conventions of 'urban' society. The expediency of the conclusion is revealed in the fact that it is totally unprepared for; we

are asked to accept the shadowy figure of 'Liza-Lu (" a spiritualized image of Tess") (p. 444), as transcending those vibrant qualities we have come to admire in Tess.

Hardy's own attitude to this mental leap is difficult to ascertain; we may wonder if Hardy created Liza-Lu as a cynical comment upon the narrowness of rational existence - or whether Hardy was so much a man of his time that he found it necessary to escape from his own intuitive sympathies, taking refuge in a character hastily constructed from conventional moral values. The inadequacy of this solution is emphasized by Arthur Efron in an important article on Tess: "We know very well that no such quick body-substitution can be of any avail, much less when the substitute is a "spiritualized image. . . ." in a book that has created itself on the corporeal body."²

"Art thou a flower? Art thou a nymph?
I see thee now a flower, Now a nymph!
I dare not pluck thee from thy dewy bed!"
(Pl. 6-7)

Controversy still surrounds the subtitle of this work, as critics weigh Hardy's justification for referring to Tess as 'A Pure Woman.' Did he mean to imply a complete, uninhibited woman, or a woman morally undefiled? Or did he mean both? The arguability of all these alternatives only serves to sharpen our perception of Tess herself. Certainly, it is significant that at our first encounter with Tess she should be dressed in white, and carrying a bunch of white flowers - explicit symbols of purity. There is, however, some suggestion of what is to come in the mention of her "mobile peony mouth", and the equally

symbolic red ribbon in her hair. Much of the introduction is achieved in sensuous terms, terms of colour, shape and texture; our first awareness of her is one of being, rather than one of thinking or reacting. Yet it is interesting that in this early episode, the only remark Hardy makes as omniscient narrator is to the effect that "Tess Durbeyfield at this time of her life was a mere vessel of emotion untinged by experience". (p.22)

Thus we are left with an initial impression of Tess as a sensuous but inexperienced creature; the whole episode takes place in a kind of unrealistic, fairy-tale atmosphere, in which Angel Clare plays the role of a mysterious prince, and Tess the unrecognized princess. It is as a result of this child-like fantasy that Tess feels "... the faintest aspect of reproach that (Angel) had not chosen her." (p.25) At the same time, Tess is quite unaware of the sexual aspect of the dance - and this introductory scene is integral in laying the foundations of her character. The point is that Tess is still in the primal, instinctive stage of innocence, unaware of her own sexual attractiveness and her capacity for sensation in this respect. This is not to say that she is incapable of thought - her belief in the earth being a "blighted star" is proof of that - but it is important to note that her reasons for such a belief are essentially experimental - her father's disabilities, her mother's shiftlessness are things that impinge directly upon her life.

Thus Tess has reached early womanhood without experiencing sexual arousal; nor has her careless mother bothered to enlighten her as to the facts of life. She has spent the whole of her life under the

protection of Nature - significantly, her sixth standard education has in no way divorced her from the rural community, as her membership in the Marlott club reveals. Her education is perhaps artistically necessary in order to suggest a refinement and intelligence in Tess, that accentuates her misfortunes beyond the more customary sorrows of those around her; but it should also be noted that she is the only Hardy heroine who survives any formal education without assimilating the rational awareness, that demands a psychological detachment from the sensible world. On the contrary, she responds instinctively without reflection or foresight. It is therefore irrelevant to talk of Tess' intentions, at least in her state of innocence prior to her seduction.

"Never in her life - she could swear it from the bottom of her soul - had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgements had come. Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently?" (p. 400)

Clearly her retrospection on her misfortunes is crystallised around the abstract moral judgements of an alien consciousness into which Tess has been initiated; for how can there be a 'sin of inadvertence'? Is it possible to commit a sin without the moral awareness that makes it a sin?

Like Oothoon in Blake's poem, Tess is in a state of innocence up to the moment of her seduction - although that does not mean that she has been protected from the vicissitudes of life.³ Indeed, her life has

been generally depressing. The point is that she accepts this state of affairs without question - she knows, nothing different. Here is the source of Tess's belonging, her fundamental harmony with her environment.

"On these lonely hills and dales her quiescent glide was of a piece with the element she moved in. Her flexuous and stealthy figure became an integral part of the scene. 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..." (p.104)

The fact is sensed by Alec d'Urberville, who acknowledges it is his own way of heaping her first with strawberries, and then with hot-house roses, making her into a kind of nature-goddess. (We may contrast the implications of this scene with the description of Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders, quoted above). The gesture is tarnished, however, partly through the artificial nature of the flowers, and partly through Tess's unwillingness to co-operate in the jest. Yet there is one side of her nature that is attracted by this assertive behaviour; her instinctive femininity is responding, despite her conscious hesitation, to the physical warmth of the situation. It is surely what D.H. Lawrence terms the Female Principle, the sensuous attraction of sweetness, and colour, and freshness, which results in her accepting "... in a half-pleased, half-reluctant state whatever d'Urberville offered her". (p. 52)

"Sweet flower, (I) put thee here to glow
 between my breasts, (Plate 1)
 "And thus I turn my face to where my
 whole soul seeks." (Plates 12-13)

The tension between Tess's instinctive consciousness and the rational awareness of the world outside is subtly revealed in the abstract philosophical considerations that follow the reality of Tess's seduction. Such elevated planes of thought can hardly be attributed to the ^{genious} ingenious Tess, nor to the egocentric Alec d'Urberville - and so we must conclude that Hardy is here making direct comment. But is it Hardy as himself, or is it Hardy ironically playing the part of the detached 'urban' moralist, who sees life only through intellectual concept and theory? Is Hardy, in fact, pursuing his notion that "thought is a disease of the flesh",⁴ by suggesting the distance between the actuality and the thought of the actuality.

The presence of irony changes the relevance of these philosophical pronouncements altogether. We may consider, for example, the concluding passages to 'Phase the First', where the intention seems to be to magnify the significance of what has occurred, and draw from it a universal principle of existence. The language suggests the exaggerated moralistic terminology that might be expected of the conventional Victorian reaction. The description of Tess as "... beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet...", the oddly coy description of the seduction as the tracing of a "coarse pattern", and the final comprehensive assertion that "... why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus..... many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order..." (p. 91) - all these points suggest a disproportionate revulsion. Even if we see this

passage in an ironic light, Tess still remains the 'victim', but hardly in the cosmic sense the literal implies. As Efron remarks... "it is not a question of fate or of moral indifference in the scheme of things. It is that the pure woman is as yet too unaware of what she seeks in the male to understand that Alec is not it, or even that it is important for any man to be it." ⁵

Indeed, the narrowness of this reaction is later balanced by a very different view of the event. Tess, still in harmony with the world about her, finds her feelings of guilt in her perception of Nature, where, "The midnight airs and gusts... were formulae of bitter reproach," and "A wet day was the expression of irremediable grief at her weakness.." (p.104). But, Hardy tells us, this guilt "... was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess' fancy - a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason". (p.104) And Hardy drives his point home - "It was they (the moral hobgoblins) that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she." Tess' guilt is the result of her awareness of social convention, the abstract rules of 'reasonable' existence that have been invented by these very 'hobgoblins'. Hardy is not indulging in abstract thought here; he is in sympathetic communion with his heroine.

Tess's immersion in the rural world is symbolised in her dreaminess, which precludes any caution born of foresight, of an awareness of herself as apart from her surroundings. By contrast, Alec d'Urberville's detachment manifests itself in a constant alertness, that clearly affords him a considerable psychological advantage over Tess. In the face of

her inexperience, Alec is able to gain complete control of the situation; he can manipulate events simply because he has this rational detachment. His experience allows him to project himself into the future and to plan present behaviour accordingly. At the same time, his sense of alienation reduces the rural environment to a tool, of which he makes **calculated use** in the journey of Tess' seduction.

Thus if Tess has no foresight prior to her seduction, she cannot be said to have intentions either; she is living according to her instincts, which are based in Nature. Consequently, Nature itself becomes the moral norm as far as Tess is concerned, and her morality is bound up in the degree to which she remains true to her own nature.⁶ This, in fact, is a standard by which other characters are judged, most notably the Reverend Clare, and the dairymaids Izzy, Marion and Retty. They possess a unity of being; despite the self-denial and pain that it causes them, they remain true to their own natures. Lawrence remarks of Tess that "She knows she is herself incontrovertibly, and she knows that other people are not herself. This is a very rare quality, even in a woman."⁷ The separation of d'Urberville and Angel Clare is of a very different nature, since it stems from a fundamental alienation, both from their environment, and more significantly, their own being.

When Tess comes to Talbothays she is in a dim state of awareness, comparable to that of Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders; whilst she retains her oneness with the natural world, there is now a

circumspection about her actions, a cautious reserve that did not exist before her seduction. Now she possesses a warm and luminous quality which adds another dimension to the lushness of Blackmoor Vale.

Talbothays offers the most complete vision of Nature representing a moral norm; the relationship that develops between Tess and Angel with this environment seems almost a continuation of the 'fairy-tale' theme that began with the village dance. The rural simplicity of their life permits "... a feeling of isolation, as if they were Adam and Eve..." (p.153). The potent evocation of primal innocence is only too obvious.

And yet even in these exalted moments of bliss there are the seeds of disaster, in Angel's intellectual perception of Tess. She has no reality for him beyond the confines of his own mind, where she exists as a kind of platonic ideal - a fact of which Tess is intuitively aware.

'She was no longer the milkmaid, but a visionary essence of woman - a whole sex condensed into one typical form. He called her Artemis, Demeter, and other fanciful names half teasingly, which she did not like because she did not understand them. 'Call me Tess', she would say askance; and he did...' (p.154)

Significantly, the relationship begins with a flash of intuition on the part of Angel that comes close to recognising the animal essence of human life, binding Tess and himself in all its unqualified exuberance and completeness. Hardy tells us that he "... seemed to discern in her something that was familiar; something which carried him back into a joyous unforeseeing past, before the necessity of taking

thought had made the heavens grey." (p.142)

If Angel unconsciously responds to the physical side of Tess's nature, it would also appear that Tess is most influenced by Angel's intellectual powers. "At first Tess seemed to regard Angel Clare as an intelligence rather than as a man..." (p.148). This is quite credible, when we consider her own incomplete awareness (we may recall Giles Winterborne's respect for Grace's urban attainments); it is the attraction that derives from what appears both desirable and unattainable. Thus, for different reasons, there is a mutual idealization. Tess' boundless admiration for Angel's accomplishments, and Angel's quest for the Ideal (reminiscent of Fitzpiers in The Woodlanders) produce a compatibility that is overwhelming in its very unexpectedness. Unfortunately, it is also illusory, since the ideal is at some distance from the real; Tess is as divorced from herself at this point as Clare.

"There was hardly a touch of earth in her love for Clare. To her sublime trustfulness he was all that goodness could be - knew all that a guide, philosopher, and friend should know. She thought every line in the contour of his person the perfection of masculine beauty, his soul the soul of a saint, his intellect that of a seer. The wisdom of her love for him, as love, sustained her dignity; she seemed to be wearing a crown..." (p.220)

Such exaltation as in their idyllic existence at Talbothays cannot endure; in order for such a state to become fulfilled, it is necessary to transcend the challenge of experience, not merely to ignore

its existence. The extent to which Angel and Tess are able to overcome this obstacle is very relevant in perceiving their natures.

"Then storms rent Theotormon's limbs;
 he roll'd his waves around
 And folded his black jealous waters round the
 adulterate pair.
 Bound back to back in Bromion's caves, terror
 and meekness dwell.
 At entrance Theotormon sits, wearing the
 threshold hard
 With secret tears. . . " (Plate 2-1, 3-7)

It is at this point in Tess that Blake's insights become particularly relevant; the anguish of Theotormon is a vivid reflection of that of Angel Clare. Again, both Tess and Oothoon come to believe in their essential innocence, after much suffering and torment.

"Oothoon weeps not; she cannot weep! Her
 tears are locked up.
 But she can howl incessant writhing her soft
 snowy limbs
 And calling Theotormon's eagles to prey upon
 her flesh;
 "I call with holy voice! Kings of the sounding air,
 "Rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect
 "The image of Theotormon on my pure trans-
 parent breast" (Plate 2. 11-16)

Hardy goes to considerable lengths to balance the scales as evenly as possible. Tess and Angel both have a similar confession of sexual misfortune to make, although it seems as if their happiness is so firm and exclusive that all else is without importance. This, indeed, is the simple, open way in which Tess reacts to Angel's confession; she is eager to forgive as she is eager to be forgiven. Her husband's reaction is very different.

Angel Clare is a man of the mind; he perceives the world about him in terms of intellectual and moral concepts, although he comes close to breaking out of such constraint in face of the almost aggressive physicality that throbs at Talbothays. Angel's education has been purely academic, divorced from the actuality of living. In contrast to Tess, who has achieved a fusion of formal learning and an innate sensitivity to experience, Angel remains in the cold, pristine world of ideas, which undeniably allow him to appear in a very favourable light to the impressionable and naive Tess.

" , , at every discovery of the abundance of his illumination, of the distance between her own modest mental standpoint and the immeasurable, Andean attitude of his, she became quite dejected. ."
(p.148)

Unfortunately for Tess, his awareness derives from intellect alone; he appears morally superior only because he professes an intellectual conviction. In periods of idyllic security, within the artificial Eden that is Talbothays, he is able to appear enlightened and compassionate; when he is as Adam, he can enact the archetypal masculine role. When he is 'betrayed' by Eve, however, his assurance is revealed to be an empty posture; he must cast his own guilt upon the woman's shoulders, since she has deprived him of his superior role. Lawrence remarks that "(Angel Clare) had no idea that there was such a thing as positive Woman, as the Female, another great living Principle counterbalancing his own male principle. He conceived of the world as consisting of the One, the male Principle."⁸

Angel Clare and Alec d'Urberville thus reflect opposite poles of urban consciousness, sharing a fundamental alienation from their own selves; Alec exhibits a egoistic lack of restraint in his desire for self-gratification, in a defiance of social convention. Angel, on the other hand, reveals an equally self-centered assimilation of rational theories and attitudes - his opinions are expressed with constant reference to current philosophical thought. The total separation between theory and practice is very evident if we look back, with a knowledge of later events, at his early contemplation of Tess.

'Tess was no insignificant creature to toy with and dismiss; but a woman living her precious life - a life which, to herself who endured or enjoyed it, possessed as great a dimension as the life of the mightiest to himself. . . This consciousness upon which he had intruded was the single opportunity of existence ever vouchsafed to Tess by an unsympathetic First Cause - her all; her every and only chance. . . ' (p. 178-9)

This is undeniably a very different Clare from the one that reveals to Tess, in a quite offhand and detached manner, his ". . . eight-and-forty hours' dissipation with a stranger." (p. 256)

As we have noted, Tess becomes intuitively more aware during their relationship that Angel is finding in her another of his ideals; she has become for him the very incarnation of purity. She tells him that "' . . . she you love is not my real self, but one in my image; the one I might have been.' " (p. 245) This is an insight of which she would not have been capable before her seduction. Tess has learnt the 'urban' art of self-appraisal, but she retains innocence enough to project into Angel the compassion and warmth that abounds in her own self.

"How can I defil'd when I reflect thy
image pure?" (Plate 3. 1. 16)

Tess is tragically unaware that his sophisticated and yet dogmatic background has drawn him far away from such spontaneous generosity of feeling; he can only respond to the abstract, almost literary, idea of 'a fallen woman', which is what Tess becomes to him. Tess abandons herself so thoroughly to her love for Angel that she accepts his every judgment ("The punishment you have measured out to me is . . . well-deserved - and you are right and just to be angry with me. . . (p. 378)

Flintcombe-Ash is the Purgatory that follows the Eden of Talbothays; just as the exalted state of emotion within Tess was reflected in pastoral fecundity and abundance, so her new mood of self-accusation is emphasized by the cruel severity of her surroundings. It is significant that Hardy now sees fit to underline the sociological forces behind this case of rural hardship.

"Of the three classes of village, the villaged cared for by its lord, the village cared for by itself, and the village uncared for either by itself or by its lord, (in other words, the village of a resident squire's tenantry, the village of free or copy-holders, and the absentee-owner's village, farmed with the land), this place, Flintcombe-Ash was the third." (p. 321)

The land itself is bleak, "a desolate drab" - land that has nothing to offer but the opportunity for endless, unrewarding toil. This is the Wessex that cannot survive without 'urban' assistance, as Tess discovers to her own discomfort. Hardy spends some effort in stressing

the alien nature of the threshing-machine and its operator, who manifestly belongs to a different world. We are told that the mechanic "... was in the agricultural world, but not of it. He served fire and smoke; these denizens of the fields served vegetation, weather, frost and sun..." (p. 366).

It is only after this arduous episode that Tess re-assesses herself more independently, coming to the conclusion that she has been harshly treated. In adopting Angel's rational views so completely, she has denied the validity of her own instinctive feeling, that she brings with all simplicity to Angel: as Oothoon to Theotormon:

"Arise, my Theotormon, I am pure
Because the night is gone that clos'd me in its
deadly black". (Plate 2. 28-29)

Her trust in Angel is the living proof of this argument, and a further aspect of her rural openness in her apparent ignorance of any feminine guide. As Efron says:

"She would have perhaps held onto Angel by bursting out with suitable and 'artful' hysteria or reproach, but it is not her nature to do such things - perhaps not in a pure woman's nature to learn tactics that go counter to her emotional make-up." 9

Blake achieves more emphatic insight:

"And does my Theotormon seek this hypocrite modesty
This knowing, artful, secret, fearful cautious
trembling hypocrite?
Then if Oothoon a whore indeed! And all the virgin joys
Of life are harlots, and Theotormon is a sick man's
dream;
And Oothoon is the crafty slave of a selfish holiness."
(Plate 6, 16 - 20).

It is Tess' purity that condemns her to suffering.

In this light, Tess' act of murder becomes a savage paradox - the final, instinctive recognition of her own alienation. It is an act of sacrificial revenge for her loss of rural innocence, for which society must in turn sacrifice her. Her reasons for returning to Alec, we are told, have been coldly expedient; she has denied her own being to do so. Even Angel becomes aware of this: "... he had a vague consciousness.... that his original Tess had spiritually ceased to recognize the body before him as hers - allowing it to drift, like a corpse upon the current, in a direction dissociated from its living will". (p. 425) Tess is understandably in the depths of Blakean Experience - she has all but accepted her role as whore - the finished product of Angel Clare's mental fastidiousness, and Alec d'Urberville's selfish unscrupulousness, different aspects of the same moral code.

The terrible finality of Tess' act establishes her in a state of higher innocence - returns her, in a sense, to the rural consciousness. The point is that it is not achieved through rational deduction, but rather through the animal instinct to turn on the tormentor. Tess murders in a super-rational, ecstatic state: the thought of consequence is quite irrelevant. She sees her act in the simplest terms. She tells Angel, after she has caught up with him "He (Alec) has come between us, and ruined us, and now he can never do it any more..." (p. 431)

Although it appears that Tess' self-sacrifice has released

both herself and Angel into an exalted state of total being, there is an intrusive irony in Angel's reaction to her deed. Once again, he responds intellectually instead of intuitively - there is a jarring note in the divergence of feeling between the two lovers, when Angel "... looked at her as she lay upon his shoulder, weeping with happiness, and wondered what obscure stain in the d'Urberville blood had led to this aberration - if it were an aberration." (p.432). Angel Clare has essentially no conception of the nature of Tess' love (if indeed it is conceivable). To quote Arthur Efron yet again; "... nowhere does (Angel) come to recognize the value of the body, or even the existence of his own bodily responses toward Tess. His thinking on the subject is cast in the terms of ethics: "Things done" vs. "Things willed".¹⁰ The dominance of 'Tenderness' Efron claims, comes not from moral consideration, but from the 'liberating shock' of Tess' murder of Alec. On the other hand, their new relationship is undoubtedly physical - they do achieve a union that allows them complete fulfilment. The tragedy lies in the price Tess has to pay for such happiness.

Yet it is significant that this period of 'higher innocence' is possible only in complete social isolation; they do not merely deny social realities, but there is even an implicit transcendence of rational awareness "their every idea was temporary and unforfeiting, like the plans of two children..." (p.433). It is, in many ways, a return to Eden.

Hardy has become involved with Tess simply because he has projected into her nature all his feelings about life as it should be, life at its purest, because most intuitive, level. This is the reason why we are able to identify with Tess so fully ourselves, because we have been caught up in Hardy's own enthusiasm and conviction. Yet a return to the world as it is must be the inevitable conclusion if the work is not to appear fantastic, and therefore of little real consequence; the fantasy must eventually capitulate to the actuality - and this may to some extent explain our own feelings of dissipation with the final episodes. Once again, Hardy is faced with a choice of 'realities', he is forced to dismiss the vivid imaginative reality embodied in Tess as unacceptable to the contemporary social outlook, and therefore Tess (and all that she stands for) must perish. But Hardy goes one step further. It would have been quite feasible for Angel Clare to have lived on alone (just as Thomasin might have remained a widow in The Return of the Native) - but Hardy sees fit to provide him with another (more suitable ?) partner, in Tess's ethereal sister, 'Liza-Lu. It is not unreasonable to suggest that here is another calculated product of Hardy's conscience, as he demonstrates to the Victorian reading public that despite all evidence to the contrary, he recognizes the pre-eminence of the human spirit over the human body. (Liza-Lu is explicitly less striking physically than was Tess.) Nevertheless, the retraction comes too late; his extreme sympathy with his vision of Tess has been too convincing, too attractive to permit a firm, satisfactory resolution in 'Liza-Lu - the lack of conviction that permeates these last

pages implies that Hardy was anxious to escape his own imagination, and return to the comparative security of social sanction, the 'reality' of urban predominance. Unfortunately, the rational consciousness is very distant from Tess's instinctive awareness - that might lead her to say, with Oothoon,

"Arise, and drink your bliss, for
everything that lives is holy! " (plate 81, 10)

FOOTNOTES

1. Blake, "Vision of the Daughters of Albion", pp 189-195.
2. Arthur Efron, The Tale, The Teller, and Sexuality in Tess of d'Urbervilles. (P. 72)
3. Blake does not imply this either; innocence is essentially a state of mind, independent of exterior circumstance. It is best exemplified in the young child who has not acquired the intellectual detachment to perceive the moral injustices beneath the physical realities of hardship. ('The Chimney Sweeper,' in the Poems of Innocence and Experience. pp. 117-212)
4. Hardy, The Return of the Native, p. 175
5. Efron, op. cit., p. 59.
6. George Wing remarks, in comparing Tess with Fancy Day, in Under the Greenwood Tree; "Admittedly Fancy's was a sin of remote intent and not of commission, but nevertheless we feel that at her marriage, she was less 'pure', in the biggest interpretation, than Tess was when she married Angel". (op. cit., p. 44)
7. D. H. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 483.
8. Ibid., p. 485.
9. Efron, op. cit., p. 68
10. Ibid., p. 71

CHAPTER IV

Conclusion

Jude the Obscure

"It is both the strength (because of the integrity that it brought), and the limit of his achievement, to have seen the source of life-creating strength for human beings as connected always with a certain limited context, the traditional rural order. As time passes, he lost confidence in the strength of this order to resist and survive; and in part, even seems more and more to have regarded the element of drabness and harshness in rural life as not a product of change and modernity, but as something in that life which was ineradicably evil. This being so, he has no position to which to retreat..."

Whilst we may hesitate before such an extreme term as 'ineradicable evil', John Holloway's incisive summary provides an excellent introduction to our consideration of Jude the Obscure (1895). The rural world has simply proved no match for urban Progress; its traditional solidity has crumbled beneath the impact of an alienated consciousness, that would use both man and nature to its own egoistic ends. The warm glow of rustic security has changed to a cold and empty landscape; nostalgia for the past has been forsaken for need in the present.

"The fresh harrow-lines seemed to stretch like the channellings in a piece of new corduroy, lending a meanly utilitarian air to the expanse, taking away its gradations, and depriving it of all history beyond that of the few recent months, though to every clod and stone these really attached associations enough and to spare - echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days, of spoken words, and

of sturdy deeds. Every inch of ground had been the site, first or last, of energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickerings, weariness...." (p.18).

The rural world has been forced to catch up, and under the glare of modernity has lost almost every trace of its quaint attractiveness and tranquility. Suddenly custom has become anachronism, revelry has been corrupted into debauchery and vice; a different life-style has imposed its own awareness upon the rural existence, and thus the filter of perception is radically altered, to meet the preconceptions that define this new way of life. The transformation is symbolized in the new church, erected "... by a certain obliterator of historic records who had run down from London and back in a day..." (p.16); all at once, the vistas of rural tradition are as nothing.

Rational life has overtaken instinctual; urban man has necessarily detached himself from his environment, freeing himself to a new independence of action and thought. Yet with this release comes a fearful sense of aloneness, an awareness of the self's frailty in face of a world that is cold, and indifferent - even hostile; and the only defence that has been given to urban man is his mind. 'My Mind to me a Kingdom is', might be considered the defiant cry of alienated man, as he attempts to re-discover a wholeness of being through the unexplored mazes of his mind. Before he can do that, however, he must find a sense of direction, based on some firm belief (or is it faith?) that will provide a rock of stability in the encompassing sea of doubt and confusion. Otherwise he will drift aimlessly, ever more hopeless as each trusting effort proves ill-founded

and futile - as each rock turns to water under his foot.

We may suspect that this was Hardy's own experience - which to some extent explains his much-discussed notions of the indifference of the universe; he has investigated every rock, and found them all insubstantial. Philip Landon puts Hardy's dilemma in the broader context: "In facing the truth which he so much respected, Hardy could admit the intellectual truths revealed by the discoveries of mid-Victorian scientific inquiry, but he could not share the hope of material progress entertained by many of the rationalists... If his intellect agreed with the rationalistic views of the universe, his sympathies remained on the side of the "sages" who sought to reconcile the extremes of rationalism and revelation. However, no solution seemed satisfactory..."²

Here is the irony of Hardy's position; his solution to the human predicament involves a return to the wholeness of being, a total fusion of body and mind, that elevates the capacity for feeling into the most important human quality. From the beginning, this unity was the dominant characteristic of the rural consciousness; and yet, through this total involvement in being, it could not survive the calculating detachment of the rational mind. The distinction reveals itself more thoroughly in the very different attitudes toward the environment; urban man, locked within his singular existence, sees all things around him as extensions of himself, to be manipulated, annexed for the purpose of satisfying a life that is centred in the self. By contrast, rural man sees all things as part of himself, and, by the same token, himself as part of his surroundings (although here it is

an instinctive awareness, and not a conceptual one.) Tess Durbeyfield is Hardy's most inspired example of this human unity; and yet she must be destroyed, as a creature unfit to live within the prevailing social structure. Like other rural characters before her, she is first exploited and then condemned by urban egocentricity; the delicate balance of her nature is transformed into a weakness, for which she must become her own sacrifice.

But the rural consciousness has gradually changed, as Hardy has attempted to compromise, searching for some happy medium where the two ways may exist in some kind of harmony. The Mayor of Casterbridge proved the impossibility of the task, for despite Henchard's unusual energy and aggressiveness, he has no real answer to the rigidly systematic mind of Donald Farfrae. We come to see that Henchard is fighting alone, against overwhelming odds; he is a living anachronism.

Subsequently, the rural character begins to be dimly aware of a world outside his own, which only serves to accelerate his downfall. Giles Winterborne, in The Woodlanders, is crippled by his efforts to adjust his own way of life to suit his urbanized mistress; it is not until he resignedly returns to his former pursuits that we see him in his natural dignity. Likewise, Tess discovers much misery and confusion in her submission to abstract moral judgements, that penetrates to her from some indistinct, extraneous Authority. She does not regain the exuberance of her own being until she can throw off such artificial constraints, and trust in her own feelings once again.

Jude the Obscure represents the final step in the process of

rural subjugation - for here we encounter the rural consciousness that instinctively yearns for escape, and rejects the unrewarding austerity of pastoral life. So weak has the rural spirit become, that even as a child Jude is detached from his existence, and is aware that a choice lies before him. Already he has come (to question the morality of his life.)

"Events did not rhyme quite as he had thought. Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony. As you got older, and felt yourself to be at the centre of your time, and not at a point in its circumference, as you had felt when you were little, you were seized with a sort of shuddering, he perceived. . . " (p. 23)

Thus Jude finds little comfort in the rugged physicality of life at Marygreen; we can almost watch his consciousness turning inward, seeking consolation from a world that appears indifferent and unequal. There is no longer any sense of instinctive communion with rural surroundings, which have themselves become an unattractive reminder of subordination to urban demands, drained of vitality and warmth. The only characters identifiable with Jude's rural birthplace are old and subdued by constant hardship. His great aunt, Drusilla Fawley, is a disillusioned and bitter woman, whose nature acts as a spur to hasten Jude's escape to more congenial surroundings. Miss Fawley's companion, Widow Edlin, is certainly of a warmer disposition, and subsequently proves of some little help to Jude but she too is an anachronism, living out her

life in a world to which she does not belong. Hardy subtly makes his point in the presents she brings Jude for his wedding! . . . singular presents, in the form of apples, jam, brass snuffers, an ancient pewter dish, a warming-pan, and an enormous bag of goose-feathers towards a bed." (p. 291)

The failure of Jude's marriage plans only serves to convince Widow Edlin that the world is no longer what it was. Thus Marygreen can offer Jude nothing - and so to escape is the only answer. The only question is whether escape is possible.

The means have been suggested by his old schoolmaster, Phillotson; even at this point, his separation, both inner and outer, is well begun, through the vivid reality of his mental objective, Christminster. Already his mind has assumed control of his being, as all efforts are trained toward that far-off haven of learning. His detachment has found a rock; Hardy tells us that ". . . it had been the yearning of his heart to find 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? . . ." (p. 30) / god quite for

Yet this single-minded concentration upon one objective has also rendered Jude susceptible to attack on a very different front. ^{sexual} ^{reason}

Development of mind has sublimated development of body, so that Jude has remained unaware of this side of his nature; we may conjecture that his sexual awakening is the more distracting for being delayed. Unlike Tess, whose first encounter with sex was unfulfilling, and, as Efron puts it, 'low-grade', ³ Jude derives considerable satisfaction from his

attraction to Arabella. Although he has in a sense already cut himself off from the rural world, he is still an instinctive male; once his naive hesitation is overcome, his virility is not questioned. And Arabella brings him back to himself - as Lawrence remarks: "It would have been possible for Jude, monkish, passionate, medieval, belonging to woman yet striving away from her, refusing to know her, to have gone on denying one side of his nature, adhering to his idea of learning, till he had stultified the physical impulse of his being and perverted it entirely. Arabella brought him to himself, gave him himself, made him free, sound as a physical male."⁴

Once she has fulfilled her role of arousing the physical aspect of Jude's existence, Arabella has little more to offer; in many ways, she represents the static rural consciousness that Jude is striving so hard to escape. She is as much a female animal as was Tess; more debased and materialistic in her assessment of Jude as potential provider, and her guileful plan of seduction that follows; nevertheless she possesses a certain integrity of character that contrasts with her urbanized rival, Sue Bridehead. Her intention is unequivocal from the moment she hits Jude with the pig's pizzle; her attraction to Jude is openly sexual and remains so throughout. She perceives him as a male animal, a separate being to whom she desires to submit herself, in the only way she knows. She is completely involved in her feelings, which take no heed of 'reasonable' considerations; ulterior motives come as after-thoughts, to embellish with logical justification the instinctive reality of her desire for Jude.

" ' I've got him to care for me: yes!
 But I want him, to more than care for
 me! I must have him. I can't do
 without him. He's the sort of man I long
 for. I shall go mad if I can't give myself
 to him. altogether! I felt I should when I
 first saw him! ' " (p. 55)

But Jude does not share her instinctive sense of commitment, that makes every action its own justification; once again, his inhibiting awareness of life's complexity acts as a restraint that prevents him from asserting his own individuality. Jude has discovered the subtle intellectual device of rationalization, that will put at one remove all feelings of guilt or weakness. On each occasion, the deed precedes the thought - and at once the episode of the rook-scaring floods back into memory. "He sounded the clacker till his arm ached, and at length his heart grew sympathetic with the birds' thwarted desires" (p. 19). The two sensations, physical and emotional, seem suspiciously interrelated. More significantly, the same avoidance of responsibility is employed in Jude's attitude toward Arabella, where the defensive rationalization is almost forgotten under the urgent pressure of another impulse.

" ' Well, it's only a bit of fun, ' he said to himself, faintly conscious that to common-sense there was something lacking, and still more obviously something redundant, in the nature of this girl who had drawn him to her, which made it necessary that he should assert more sportiveness on his part as his reason in seeking her. . . " (p. 47)

Arabella manifests rather more candour in the relationship

than does Jude - not from any higher ethical code, but from a more unified (if more restricted) consciousness. Indeed, it is ^{divergent} ^{aspirations} Jude's mental detachment that lifts him out of marriage, just as it was previously lifting him out of the rural environment. His relationship with Arabella is undeniably a physical and emotional arousal, and yet it does not involve his whole being. In no way can it obliterate his desire for intellectual advancement; it can only postpone. For sooner or later Jude will come to regard his marriage with the same analytic detachment that he brought to bear upon his life at Marygreen; he is aware of the existence of alternatives. Thus Arabella waits in vain for Jude to ". . . throw aside those stupid books for practical ^{one's} ^{purposes} undertakings. . ." (p. 65) - eventually it is his books that are the cause of the final marital disruption. But theory is preferable to practise, as far as Jude is concerned - and so it is Arabella who takes the decisive step of leaving.

Thus Jude is released to continue his quest for Christminster; his preoccupation with the development of mind is the more determined for his 'irrational' experience with Arabella, which has delayed his ambition for so long. Body has become synonymous with enslavement and mindlessness; a part of himself Jude wishes to deny, since it is closely connected with his rural origins. Christminster offers him such an escape, both socially and psychologically; he can lose the weaknesses and imperfections of his past in the pure realms of academic endeavour.

Experience provokes disillusion, however, as the real falls far short of the ideal. Yet even as this rock dissolves before him, Jude's intuitive

awareness of life does not desert him; almost unwillingly he is sustained by his rural consciousness.

"He began to see that the town life was a book of humanity infinitely more palpitating, varied and compendious than the grown life. These struggling men and women before him were the reality of Christminster, though they knew little of Christ or Minster. That was one of the humours of things. . . " (p. 126)

And in Christminster, Jude meets his cousin, Sue Bridehead, to whom he is drawn half-reluctantly, half-compulsively:

" ' After all, he said, 'it is not altogether an 'erotolepsy' that is the matter with me, as at that first time. I can see that she is exceptionally bright; and it is partly a wish for intellectual sympathy, and a craving for loving-kindness in my solitude.' Thus he went on adoring her, fearing to realize that it was human perversity. . . " (p. 105)

Fundamentally separated from the possibilities of his own intuitive being, Jude plunges blindly into a relationship with Sue, revealing the same lack of self-control and understanding in his admiration for her mind, as previously for Arabella's body. Once again, the rationalization is thrown like a fistful of dust in the eyes of his intuition, to prevent the mental image that he has constructed of himself from being shattered. The desire for escape is obsessive; Jude has no awareness of the fact that his encounter with Arabella brought him to himself, in the sense that it awoke a basic, instinctive part of his being - and thus it is hardly surprising that he does not understand Sue's motives in this new relationship, because he does not

understand his own. As Lawrence remarks, "Like Jude, she wanted to live partially, in the consciousness, in the mind only. She wanted no experience in the senses, she wished only to know! It is a tragic compatability, built on illusion.

Indeed, Sue is far more willing to administer to Jude's mental needs than to those of the body. For Sue is the consummate 'urban' character - (Aunt Drusilla contemptuously calls her 'townish' in warning off the enamoured Jude) - who is so detached, alienated from the sources of her being that she seems to hover, like some ethereal spirit, above the hard, prosaic earth, at the mercy of the slightest intellectual breeze. Her philosophical nature is reflected in her physical movement; she is characterized by a nervous lightness, that corresponds with the agile unpredictability of her mind.

She considers herself dominated by her intellect, since she has found that it places her at the center of existence. She conceives of it as the key to all truth, all happiness, all spiritual revelation. It is also the key to feminine domination - the one area in which woman can be the equal, if not the superior, of any male. The feminine role has traditionally been one of subordination - a role that Arabella, in all her ebullience, is willing to accept - but Sue is a rational, emancipated woman (at least, that is her image of herself), who is determined to wield her intellect like a weapon. In Lawrentian terms, Sue evinces the male principle of mind; thus she can stimulate Jude, in his desire to know, but she can never allow him domination.

Through his naive respect for the brilliance of her intellect, Jude is not a difficult person to dominate, for he finds in Sue the personification of his ideal - the ultimate escape. Unfortunately, he does not recognize - at least consciously - the complexity of his feelings for Sue; his detachment has cut him off from his own being. As Michael Steig points out: "His attraction to her is dual, for he finds her sexually attractive and yet is drawn to an asexuality he senses in her, which represents an escape from the burden of sexual guilt. . . . that he feels about his lust for Arabella." ⁶

Here is a woman who can offer him a communion of minds - and so he moulds himself submissively to her existence, as (at the bidding of a very different impulse), he had previously moulded himself to Arabella. Jude's fascination with Sue bears close comparison with Tess' infatuation with Angel Clare; both rural characters are attracted by the mysterious glamour of intellect, which seems to contain the very essence of freedom and nobility. The unity of the rural consciousness prevents any suspicion that there might be a psychological barrier between thought and deed - that intellectual assertiveness could conceal a subtle refusal to confront the problems of life. Unlike Tess, however, Jude is unable to return to any intuitive awareness of his own being; his early dissatisfaction with rural life has allowed him to assimilate too thoroughly the alienation of the urban consciousness.

Sue, it appears, has never felt anything; her life has been a procession of intellectual attitudes and ideals, that have never been disturbed

Jude as experienced

by the acid test of experience. She possesses the peculiarly urban characteristic of being able to weave an alluring web of intellect to conceal an inner emptiness. Before he becomes hopelessly entangled, Jude has a fleeting perception of this sophisticated veneer, but is too intent upon the abstract ideal to recognize the human implications. Rural surroundings are inescapably real to Jude; Sue perceives them with intellectual detachment, as a collection of concepts.

" 'I rather like this', said Sue.... 'Outside all laws except gravitation and germination. 'You only think you like it; you don't; You are quite a product of civilization', said Jude...
 'Indeed I am not, Jude. I like reading and all that, but I crave to get back to the life of my infancy and its freedom.' " (P.145)

So divorced is Sue from the reality of experience that her every act is characterized by its debilitating uncertainty; almost invariably, a contrary impulse is excited once the deed is done.

Wife - 1.11.11

"... Sue's logic was extraordinarily compounded and seemed to maintain that before a thing was done it might be right to do, but that being done it became wrong; or, in other words, that things which were right in theory were wrong in practise." (p.227)

controversial

She sees every situation in the round, so that to act in one particular way must leave untold alternatives that could be more advantageously 'reasonable'; and hence we encounter all the aggravating inconsistencies in her conduct that Jude, in his interpretation, vaguely interprets as part of her superior insight into life- and therefore never

questions. At the same time, the need to retain her intellectual dominance over Jude occasionally forces her into acts that are both reckless and irrational. Thus she impulsively marries the unfortunate Phillotson to pay Jude back for the fact of his marriage with Arabella. Further, she must exploit the situation by begging Jude to give her away. To re-establish her superiority, she calculatedly throws Jude's 'mental advantage' in his face, without any thought of the suffering that might ensue.

Gradually we come to realize how thoroughly the instinctive rural consciousness in Jude has been suppressed, in his obsessive desire to live up to the abstract ideal that chains him to Sue. But he cannot escape his own self, however hard he tries to accept Sue's sublimations. To finally demonstrate that there is no 'touch of earth' in his love for Sue, he must overcome the physical temptation held out to him by Arabella. He fails - simply because he cannot deny the sexuality within him. Beneath all the mental constraints that Sue has placed upon him, there pulses the instinctive awareness of the body's existence, which only requires Arabella's animality to be brought to the surface.

When Sue is confronted with this challenge, the basis of her predominance is threatened; she fears Arabella, for she recognizes that the latter can offer Jude a satisfaction, a fulfillment that she has denied him, and her mastery over him will be lost. And so her sexual submission to Jude is a rational act of expediency, calculated to retain Jude within her grasp. At once the sincerity of Sue's intellectual convictions is brought into doubt; suddenly they appear as postures, empty professions

that are a defense against a profound sense of insecurity and alienation. Sue feels persecuted by a world she defies mentally, but cringes before experientially - and therefore love can only be dealt with as a concept, an abstraction, so that it does not threaten her inner frailty. She tells Jude that ". . . sometimes a woman's love of being loved gets the better of her conscience, and though she is agonized at the thought of treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her while she doesn't love him at all. . . ." (p. 251) When she is encased within her mind, confident in the easy manipulation of momentous thoughts and ideas, Sue evinces a boldness and a gaiety that is almost masculine in quality. When, on the other hand, extraneous forces seem to threaten the mental bubble of her life, her inadequacy is immediate and obvious, for her very being is in question.

Sue returns to the security of social and religious conformity that she has taught Jude to despise; but for Jude there is no escape. Hardy must leave him in all the lonely anguish of Purgatory as the last rock of hope dissolves from under his feet; he cannot go back, nor is there any reason or justification for going on. His awakening to Reason, to the urban awareness, has only revealed a pervasive and irreconcilable disillusionment, from which the only release is in death. There is no other answer.

FOOTNOTES

1. Holloway, The Charted Mirror, p.107
2. Landon, op. cit., p.95
3. Efron, op. cit., p.59
4. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 204-5
5. Ibid., p.206
6. Michael Steig, Sue Bridehead, Novel, Vol. 1 No. 3
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