

HARDY'S RUSTIC CHILDREN: A PLEA
FOR THE OLD ORDER

A THESIS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is Thomas Hardy's rustic sketches and the pastoral arena in which they move. This arena is characterized by two strains. On the one hand there is the able and stalwart rustic imbued with all of the Hardyan goddesses--simplicity, truth, fidelity, and stability. On the other there is the element of change and conflict personified by the interloper from an urban Other-world. Although the principal focus of the paper is the function of the Wessex rustic, the urban invader plays no mean part in this explanation. In order to offer an interpretation of the rustic in Hardy, it is necessary to pay some attention to this disturbing presence in the author's universe. Hardy sets up a contrast between the changeless characters, the rustics who accept nature as it is, and the modern figures, the diabolical characters who struggle against the natural order of life.

In the Wessex novels, Hardy makes a penetrating statement about the changing Victorian countryside. This pronouncement is made through the peasant, largely by opposing him to his city cousin, the herald of change and instability.

To interpret the Wessex rustic, one must first know who he is. He resides in a rural neighborhood and gains his livelihood from the land, either directly from his own labor, or indirectly, through the labor of others. He is tied to the land, but he gains no wealth from it. His dialect emphasizes his rusticity.

In examining the rustic in the Wessex novels, I will generally follow the sequence in which the novels were published. And although I will discuss all of these works (Under the Greenwood Tree, Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure), the focus of the study will concern Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and The Woodlanders.

Chapter II analyzes Hardy's background and the events which formed his temperament. It looks at how Hardy came to use his folk as mouthpieces for his own convictions. Chapter III focuses upon the agents of change, conflict, and modernization. These agents--Troy, Wildeve, and Fitzpiers--undo the honest strivings of the peacemakers. Chapter IV examines the peacemakers, the agents of constancy, the changeless rustic, as symbolized by Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne, with a view toward finally offering a comprehensive statement about the function of Hardy's rustics.

CHAPTER II

THE CEMENT IS POURED

To understand Thomas Hardy, one must pay some attention to the social and intellectual milieu that conditioned him. To know Hardy, one must know Dorset, the West End Region of his birth and the setting of his novels. Hardy came from a region that was very different from the rest of England in the nineteenth century. It had its own language, its own customs, and its own traditions.

Dorset was a remote and old-fashioned county which was rich in memories. Some of Hardy's earliest memories were of men in stocks, of corn-law agitations, of mail-coaches, road-wagons, tinder boxes, and candle-snuffing. He had seen two public hangings by the time he was sixteen. One of these victims was a woman who had killed her lover, a situation which probably influenced his creation of the character Tess. He had seen or heard of such customs as the skimmity-ride, the maypole, the mummers who gave the play of St. George at Christmas, the old-fashioned hiring fairs for farm laborers, and the sale of wives by husbands,¹ the latter

¹ Merryn Williams, A Preface to Hardy (New York: Longman, 1975), pp. 58-64.

echoing the defining event in The Mayor of Casterbridge. These ancient rites and traditions fueled Hardy's fiction and gave color to the imaginary region so prominent therein. Hardy knew this land and its people; he knew his Wessex.

Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, a few miles outside of Dorchester, during the early years of Queen Victoria. It was an age devoid of frills such as the railroad and electricity. There was no substantial connection between the urban center of London and rural Dorset. But things were changing. When he was seven, the railroad came to Dorchester. Hardy bemoaned the loss of the countryside's traditional ballads, "the orally transmitted ditties of centuries being slain at a stroke by the London comic songs"² that were introduced. The ballads were not the only thing Hardy regretted. His family had a long connection with the cultural life of the parish which had come to an end when he was only a year old. For forty years before that, his grandfather, and then his father and uncle, had been the nucleus of a little group of musicians who accompanied the services at Stinsford Church.³ Hardy felt a deep respect for these people and a deep regret that

² Florence Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 54.

³ Florence Hardy, p. 42.

choirs like this had been abolished all over England when he was a boy. He noted that the musicians were "mainly poor men and hungry, but were good at and devoted to their work."⁴ Hardy designed the Latin inscription in Stinsford Church to the three generations of Hardys who had made music there, and he later drew a loving and detailed picture of this little group in Under the Greenwood Tree.

Other changes were taking place. One instance is the social conditions at Dorset. An extremely poor region, Dorset was one of several counties involved in the last labor revolt of 1836.⁵ In 1840, agriculture was the most important industry. In the last sixty years of the nineteenth century, the population in England more than doubled. The rural aristocracy consisted of over three-hundred landed families, while half of England's farmers were tenants dependent upon these landed squires for their sustenance. A large gap existed between rich farmer and landless laborer.⁶ Confrontation between the "haves" and the "have-nots" was inevitable.

⁴ Florence Hardy, p. 48

⁵ G. W. Sherman, "Thomas Hardy and the Agricultural Laborer," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 7 (1968), 111-18.

⁶ Sherman, p. 110.

Six years before Hardy's birth, a group of laborers in the little village of Tolpuddle banded together to form a trade union branch. These men demanded an increase in wages from seven to ten shillings per week. They were tried and convicted of administering a treasonable oath, and they were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment at Botany Bay. Of course, their only "crime" was that of collective bargaining. These men became known to history as the Six Tolpuddle Martyrs. This crisis stifled or set trade unionism back for forty years.

In the sixties, union branches began to appear in the underpaid South; in 1872 Joseph Arch's National Union was funded in Warwickshire. But its central achievement was to help laborers to migrate. Though tardy in coming, reform was on the way. The Agriculture Holding Acts of 1875 and 1885 protected investments in land leased or rented by tenants and offered compensation for improvements made by them. But the damage was done, and by the end of the century the disenchanted English laborer was willing to leave the village for town.⁷

Hardy grew up in this tumult and knew the suffering of laborers. He was later to relate to his second wife, Florence, the circumstances surrounding the death of a

⁷ Sherman, p. 115.

shepherd boy who died of starvation, the contents of his stomach at the time of his death being only raw turnips.⁸ Hardy was keenly alive to the plight of the agricultural laborer, and it is in his fiction that we find him again and again demonstrating this brooding empathy for the "old, the faithful, but unwanted ones."⁹ The characters and scenes in the Wessex novels remind one that life in Dorset for the agricultural worker was no "shangri-la." Fanny Robin (Far from the Madding Crowd) dies in the Dorchester workhouse near where Hardy grew up. Michael Henchard (The Mayor of Casterbridge) at first is an unemployed haytrusser who has come to the depopulated village where there is no work or shelter. This character is also the old experienced shepherd who is ignored at the hiring fair by farmers who are looking for younger and stronger men. Marty South (The Woodlanders) earns less than a shilling subsistence wage making spars and is obliged to sell her hair. Tess is a migratory agricultural worker at Flintcombe Ash, which Hardy describes as "a depopulated village and a starve-acre place."¹⁰ Jude's honest labor is exploited in Christminster,

⁸ Florence Hardy, p. 89.

⁹ Ruth Firor, Folkways in Thomas Hardy (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1931), p. 73.

¹⁰ Thomas Hardy, Tess of the D'Urbervilles (London: Macmillan, 1891), p. 181.

the city of his dreams. These events symbolize the new order, an age in which striving and honest labor had little value. It was an unstable age against which Hardy and his folk struggled.

Hardy saw signs of this instability in his own family. He saw its declining fortunes as token and symbol of the end of a culture. He knew a great deal about his ancestors who had lived and died in Dorset. The Hardy clan was well-known there; one ancestor founded Hardy's Grammar School in Dorchester and another was the famous Admiral Hardy in whose arms Nelson died.¹¹ They owned a great deal of land but lost all of it. Hardy records in his diary that the "decline and fall of the Hardy's [are] much in evidence here about . . . so we go down, down, down."¹² In "Night in the Old Home," the poem in which he imagines himself talking to his ancestors, Hardy describes himself as a "pale late plant of your once strong stock."¹³ We see him brooding over the decline of old families in Tess of the D'Urbervilles and The Woodlanders. He creates a family which is marked down by fate in Jude the Obscure.

¹¹ Williams, A Preface, p. 17.

¹² Florence Hardy, p. 29.

¹³ Thomas Hardy, "Night in the Old Home," in Collected Poems, ed. J. O. Bailey (London: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 242-43.

Hardy came half from the yeoman class and half from the laboring class. His father's people had been influential yeomen since Shakespeare's time and his mother's people smaller landowners nearly as long.¹⁴ Both families had suffered economically and socially with the gradual depletion of their class. His mother had been orphaned as a young girl; her son noted:

By reason of her parents' bereavement and consequent poverty under the burden of a young family, Jemima during girlhood and young womanhood had some very stressful experiences of which she could never speak in her maturer years without pain, though she appears to have mollified her troubles by reading every book she could lay hands on.¹⁵

It was his mother, no doubt, who gave Hardy his deep interest in books. In his writings, he, in turn, spoke for the bedraggled and annihilated members of his mother's class.

Although his family had been master masons for four generations, the elder Hardy did not fare as well. Thomas Hardy senior was content to remain a small builder and life-renter in a remote village community; he was not an ambitious man. His son noted that his father "lacked the

¹⁴ Rebecca West, "Rebecca West Proves a Beautitude," Literary Digest, February, 1931, p. 68.

¹⁵ Florence Hardy, p. 52.

art of enriching himself by business."¹⁶ Had the senior Hardy been more alive to worldly opportunity, he would have removed his business into Dorchester, but he never did. He made a decent living in Higher Bockhampton, and the family belonged to the upper class in the village. As Hardy was later to learn, however, his family was regarded as peasants in the world outside of this hamlet.

In London as a young man, Hardy encountered the snobbery of the English upper classes, a slight which was to haunt him for the rest of his life. In later years, after his reputation as a great writer had been established, his detractors referred repeatedly to his lack of a formal education. David Cecil, in an uncharitable tribute, writes:

They [the novels] have the touching pedantry of the self-educated countryman naively pleased with his hardly acquired learning. . . . No amount of painstaking study got him within reach of achieving that intuitive good taste, that instinctive grasp of the laws of literature, which is the native heritage of one bred from childhood in the atmosphere of a high culture.¹⁷

That other literary greats such as Shakespeare, Keats, Austen, and the Brontës had had no formal education was a

¹⁶ Florence Hardy, p. 64.

¹⁷ David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist: An Essay in Criticism (New York: Mamaroneck, 1972), p. 146.

matter of no moment to these remarkably vain critics.¹⁸

Hardy had the typical education of the average middle-class English boy from Tudor to late Victorian times. He went to the village school and then to an Academy; moreover, he had excellent teachers. And though he left school at age sixteen, his vast knowledge of people and his tolerance for simple humanity would do credit to others of "finer" understanding. Hardy's *Jude* is the definitive example of an obscure working man who is struggling for the "educational heritage which for centuries has been denied his class."¹⁹

Deeply troubled by these social injustices, Hardy addressed these concerns in his great novels. He drew from his own deep knowledge of folk and their traditions as he crafts his sympathetic portrait of the country dweller. Hardy's portrait is more honest and realistic than are those by earlier country writers. Hardy's folk are real, and they have real problems. The Dorset peasant is imbued with an unconscious wit not found in earlier peasant sketches. Havelock Ellis asserts:

The English agricultural laborer is a figure that few novelists have succeeded in describing. Few, indeed have had the opportunity of knowing him.

¹⁸ Williams, A Preface, p. 82.

¹⁹ Merryn Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 201.

George Eliot, who has represented so much of the lower strata of English rural life, has not reached him. At best he is visible in the dim background. . . . It is difficult to find fit company for the quaint and worthy fellowship so racy of the earth, who greet us from the pages of [Hardy].²⁰

The English country novel before Hardy had a way of looking at the peasant that dehumanized him. Evidence of this limited view of the countryman is found in the works of Frances Trollope, Jane Austen, William and Mary Howitt, and George Eliot. These writers fail to define and describe the rustic because they give no attention to the quality of his work and the nature of his relationship to others. Unlike the Hardyan rustic, the earlier peasant fails to establish the right kind of relationship with nature. He has no zest for life, and he is not complex. Rather, he is a shadowy figure who is generally hidden from our view.

We see this limited view of the English countryman in Trollope's Town and Country. Here, the author draws a simple moral contrast between a country vicarage and Regency London. But there is no effort in this work to know and understand the countryman. We rarely see this figure acting out any real association with nature or with

²⁰ Havelock Ellis, "Thomas Hardy," Westminster Review, 12 (1934), 126.

his fellow man. He emerges as an inept caricature whom we do not recognize. Though he is dressed in rustic garb, he remains unconvincing because he does not know the land.

Jane Austen's country-house novels also fail to present a credible portrait of the simple countryman. Her characters are upper-middle-class English ladies and gentlemen. They have no alliance with the land or with honest labor, both Hardy's virtues. In Pride and Prejudice and in Emma, we glimpse no simple humanity. Instead, we find two characters who are "far from the madding crowd" indeed, but also far from the peasant crowd. Stubborn Elizabeth Bennett and spoiled and willful Emma Woodhouse cannot know the world of a Marty South or a Tess D'Urberville. Austen's distressed damsels are concerned with acquiring suitable matrimonial matches; Tess and Marty are concerned with survival. Unlike Hardy's heroines, Elizabeth and Emma are preoccupied with domestic matters and love affairs. They have not established the right kind of relationship with nature. Indeed, they do not know nature, a prerequisite for admission into Hardy's universe. To qualify as one of Hardy's worthy folk, Elizabeth Bennett and Emma Woodhouse must quit their respective parlors.

The work of the Howitts is uneven in both attitude and quality. They waver between the description of country life

as it actually was and the idealized conception of what it ought to have been. In the vast and shapeless book Rural Life in England we are afforded a less than clear view of the rustic. This work perceives the countryman as happy, innocent, and oblivious to the ways of the world. Its idealization of the laborer's past dooms the work as inaccurate and stereotypical.²¹

In Silas Marner and in Adam Bede George Eliot dabbles in rural realism and at the same time celebrates her own rural past. Silas Marner, an anti-industrial novel, is an affirmation of solidarity with the working class. Eliot's works, like Hardy's, contrast rural and industrial England and oppose town to country. But the reader cannot hold up Silas and Adam in the same realistic and revealing light that he can Hardy's people. Silas eventually comes to live the life of a country squire, and Adam, through his own initiation, becomes wise to the ways of the world. But these two protagonists are clearly no Giles Winterborne or Gabriel Oak. Eliot's people have a superficial association with nature; they do not know the land. Unlike Hardy's countrymen, they have no reverence for the land; nor are they of it. Eliot maintains that "to make men moral,

²¹ Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 58.

something more is requisite than to turn them out to grass."²² She ignores her own advice. After placing her characters in a rural setting, Eliot abandons her efforts to create a believable country dweller.

Thomas Hardy does not merely deposit his folk into a country setting. He defines them in terms of that background; Hardy's people possess a certain fixity of character that makes them models of stability and honesty. They are what they are and they do not change, a fact which illustrates how Hardy intruded his judgments into the novels. Through his rustics, Hardy bemoans the dying culture of Wessex and the advent of unwholesome change.

A central theme in Hardy is that of class consciousness, an element indicative of the changing face of Wessex. Most of the novels contain a figure who, by reason of educational privilege and money, is able to condescend to the peasant. Hardy's is an almost self-conscious attitude toward matters of social class and rank. In an early novel, An Indiscretion in the Life of a Heiress, he levels a biting attack on the snobbery and artificiality of the English upper classes. While the work suffers from stylistic problems such as mechanical plotting and unconvincing characterization, it does show us Hardy the novice

²² Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 61.

writer aiming this first of many attacks at the highly stratified social system. The young hero in this novel, Egbert Mayne, is a member of the peasant class; he inevitably falls in love with the wealthy young heiress, who is, of course, just beyond his social reach. The relationship is doomed; her father, the landed squire, will have none of it, a sentiment ironically re-echoed years later by James Gifford, father of Emma, Hardy's first wife. Michael Millgate reports that Gifford was outraged that Hardy, "a low-born churl, would presume to marry into [his] family."²³ Millgate goes on to suggest that indeed Emma Gifford Hardy could never quite convince herself that she had not married beneath herself. To substantiate this claim, Millgate points to that lady's repeated statement to her husband: "Remember, Thomas Hardy, you married a lady."²⁴

Perhaps this is one reason that, in the Wessex novels, one finds that Hardy always prefers the lover of lower social rank. In Under the Greenwood Tree, he prefers the carrier to the vicar. In The Woodlanders, he is on the side of the rich country girl rather than the rich townswoman. Hardy favors the shepherd over the landed farmer

²³ Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 400.

²⁴ Millgate, p. 402.

and the Sergeant, who has some claims to nobility, in Far from the Madding Crowd. In The Return of the Native, it is the reddleman over the innkeeper and the country girl over the captain's daughter. In Tess of the D'Urbervilles, he chooses Angel Clare over the counterfeit aristocrat, Alec. And Hardy prefers Henchard to young Farfrae in The Mayor of Casterbridge.

Aside from creating characters whose lives are negatively affected by their own social class, Hardy draws many of his people from his own strong Biblical knowledge. As a youth, Hardy soaked in the religious atmosphere of Stinsford Church; here, he acquired a deep knowledge of the Bible, a knowledge which is abundantly evident in his art. He assigns names to his characters largely for their combination of Biblical and rustic associations. For example, Hardy draws the "arch-angelic Gabriel Oak, and Bathsheba Everdene, recalling the lady for whom King David sinned, down to Joseph Poorgrass, Jacob Smallbury, Matthew Moon, and Laban Tall."²⁵ In the scene in this novel in which Bathsheba banishes Oak from her farm, ". . . there is the simple accent of Bible truth."²⁶ And Oak, the good shepherd,

²⁵ Joseph Warren Beach, The Technique of Thomas Hardy (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1922), p. 51.

²⁶ Beach, p. 50.

"went away from her in placid dignity, as Moses left the presence of the Pharoah."²⁷ In The Return of the Native, Clym Yeobright is, after his many troubles, an itinerant preacher, "lonely and misunderstood, rather like Hardy himself."²⁸ These and other scenes in the Wessex novels recall Hardy's early training at Stinsford Church, but they also provide us with a view of the rustic in his Biblical and pious simplicity.

Another recurring element in Hardy's work is his deep concern for man and the lower animals. This respect for nature and all of her creatures no doubt had its inception in the Dorset of Hardy's past, before the advent of the railroad, seen in Hardy as the transporter of detriment to the countryside. In a conversation with Joseph Archer in 1904, Hardy remarked, "what are my books but one plea against man's inhumanity to man--to woman--and the lower animals?"²⁹ He not only proclaimed it in his writings, but he also practiced it in his actions. In 1911, he was the principal witness in a prosecution for cruelty to a cow in Dorchester.³⁰ In the novels are numerous examples of

²⁷ Beach, p. 50.

²⁸ Beach, p. 90.

²⁹ G. H. Sherman, "Thomas Hardy and the Lower Animals," Prairie Schooner, N. 20 (1946), 304.

³⁰ Sherman, "Thomas Hardy and the Lower Animals," p. 306.

Hardy's fondness for all of nature's creatures: the bird in The Mayor of Casterbridge "singing a trite old evening song";³¹ the insects in The Return of the Native fraternizing with Clym as he cuts furze on Egdon Heath; or the glowworms in the same book watching, while they provide the light, the outdoor dice game between Venn and Wildeve; the dogs, old George and young George, in Far from the Madding Crowd; the snared rabbit in Jude the Obscure--and many more--all of them were, as H. C. Duffin terms them, the "everlasting children of the world"³² to Hardy.

The nearest that Hardy came to escaping from the social realities of urban encroachment was in his pastoral idealization of the denizens of Wessex, both animal and human. In all forms of pastoral, a criticism of urban life is suggested. Hardy felt that "if the factory replaced the farm, then, . . . so must spiritual impoverishment replace the traditional means of binding man successfully to his surroundings."³³ Nowhere is this attitude more pronounced than in Hardy's portrait of the obscure working man, Jude.

³¹ Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 46.

³² Sherman, "Thomas Hardy and the Lower Animals," p. 306.

³³ Michael Squires, "Far from the Madding Crowd as Modified Pastoral," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 25 (1970), 299.

Raised in the arable county of Berkshire, Jude is a member of the semi-independent class; his guardian, his great aunt, runs a baker's shop. In this novel, Hardy indicts child labor through Jude, the rook-scarer. But he also suggests here that the modern laborer has a less intimate and kindly connection to the land than in earlier times. Jude is not cognizant of his traditions; he has no knowledge of village customs. He alone of Hardy's folk harbors no reverence for the land. In this novel, Hardy decries the loss of men like Jude who have no continuity with nature. The earlier worthy and striving Hardyan rustic has now darkened into Jude, the obscure, who is oblivious to family attachment and rural traditions. Hardy ended his fiction at the deathbed of Jude Fawley. In Jude, Hardy personifies the dying culture of Wessex, and at the close of the novel, he appears to assert with poignant and nostalgic finality that "God was palpably present in the country and the devil had gone with the world to town."³⁴

³⁴ Squires, p. 127.

CHAPTER III

A CRACK IN THE FOUNDATION

In the novels Hardy perceives "town" as the origin of the diabolical intruders who intrude into the rustics' world. Hardy's plots often introduce disturbing outsiders into a tranquil current of events. This outsider turns the current and often deflects it to a tragic end. Much will be said about these "apples of discord"¹ later in this chapter, but first a word should be interposed here concerning the history, nature, and form of the pastoral.

To understand pastoral literature, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the European pastoral in general. This genre is the earliest of all forms of poetry and is associated with first rank names in literature. Among these are Theocritus, Vergil, Spenser, and Milton. W. W. Greg holds that the ancient bard Theocritus pioneered this form because Theocritus faithfully reproduced the "main conditions of actual life" and set up a contrast between "recollections of a childhood spent among the Sicilian

¹ J. O. Bailey, "Hardy's 'Mephistophelian Visitants'." PMLA, 66 (1946), 1146-84.

uplands and the crowded social and intellectual life of Alexandria."² This fiction, Greg continues, found birth among the Augustan writers in the midst of the "complex and luxurious civilization of Rome."³ Thus, we have the advent of later pastoral writers such as Ovid, Lucretius, and Vergil.

Essential to the development of this genre was a sense of contrast between town and country; universal elements in this art form include the espousal of a golden age of rustic simplicity, an insistence upon the objective pastoral setting, and a recognition of a contrast between pastoral life and some more complex civilization. The pastoral people are primarily rustics or shepherds.

Hardy indicates in his personal notebook that he read deeply the works of the early pastoral writers. Like Theocritus, who while living in the urban center of Alexandria, sought the healing tonic afforded by the unhurried life of the Sicilian uplands, Hardy also sought solace in his native Dorset. Both Theocritus and Hardy react in their writing to a world that is too much with them. It was a world peopled by the heralds of change, a key element in Hardy. He observed the patterns of change and conflict

² W. W. Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1959), p. 2.

³ Greg, pp. 2-6.

which were occurring in the Victorian countryside and intruded his judgments concerning this inconstancy into his novels. The diabolical and cynical breed which J. O. Bailey calls the "Mephistophelian visitant"⁴ appears in the first of Hardy's novels about country life, Under the Greenwood Tree, and runs through Jude the Obscure. Tracing the development of the visitant in the Wessex novels, one observes that he becomes increasingly complex and unwholesome. For example, the mild and unthreatening agents present in Under the Greenwood Tree in no way resemble the strong disturbing forces found in later novels such as Tess of the D'Urbervilles and The Mayor of Casterbridge.

Hardy's invaders change the course of the lives of the major characters, and their appearance calls up the demonic or preternatural. In Hardy individuals are characterized directly in proportion to their contribution to maintaining the community in a condition of health. The invader, usually an urban figure, contributes in no way to the welfare of the community. Though he plays a pivotal role in the novels, he is fickle and disloyal; he takes from, rather than gives to, the rural community.

In Under the Greenwood Tree, Hardy introduces the first of his invaders to the rural arena. There are three

⁴ Bailey, p. 1147.

invaders in this novel, but they are all unthreatening. They in no way resemble their descendants in later novels. At best these interlopers represent only petty nuisances. Hardy is more concerned here with the conflict between the old-fashioned ways of the village choir and the up-to-date ideas of Parson Maybold and Fancy Day. Fancy is betrothed to Dick Dewey, son of the tranter, a member of the old order of the community. This conflict is best illustrated during the wedding of Fancy and Dick.

In the old days a wedding party marched around the parish, as Hardy phrased it, "with each man hooked up to his woman."⁵ Fancy objected, saying, "I could never make a show of myself that way. . . . Respectable people don't nowadays."⁶ Old-fashioned opinion overcame Fancy's objections; she agreed to march. But when they lined up, each man with his woman, Fancy said, "The proper way is for bridesmaids to walk together."⁷ The guests were amazed. Even Fancy's father, that amusingly snobbish gentleman, who would elect the invader Shiner over the rustic Dick Dewey for his son-in-law, commented, "'Twas always young

⁵ Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 312.

⁶ Thomas Hardy, Greenwood, p. 320.

⁷ Thomas Hardy, Greenwood, p. 321.

man and young woman in my time."⁸ And the reticent old William added, "Never heard of such a thing as woman and woman."⁹ Fancy surrendered again. But in the dance under the greenwood tree, all the guests were on their best behavior. Hardy writes, "The propriety of everyone was intense, by reason of the influence of Fancy, who had instructed her father and others to avoid saying 'thee' and 'thou' in their conversation for those words sounded so very humiliating to persons of newer taste; also that they were never to be seen drawing the back of the hand across the mouth after drinking--a . . . custom of extraordinary antiquity."¹⁰ Here Hardy seems to chuckle behind his hand and suggest that if Fancy has her way, Dick, the tranter's son, will soon be a modern man.

The Ariadne thread of change as symbolized by the visitant continues in The Mayor of Casterbridge. In this work, we observe two visitants, Richard Newsome and Donald Farfrae. These men alternate in playing the role of intruder into the rural scene. Newsome is the amoral seaman who intrudes into Henchard's family at the defining event of the novel. This roving sailor participates in the

⁸ Thomas Hardy, Greenwood, p. 324.

⁹ Thomas Hardy, Greenwood, p. 323.

¹⁰ Thomas Hardy, Greenwood, p. 338.

wife-selling scene, when the drunkened Henchard trades his wife and daughter for a song. Later in the novel, Newsome allows his long-suffering wife to believe him dead after an accident at sea. Yet, he arrives in Casterbridge to oversee Henchard's destruction. Newsome exhibits no sadness when he hears that his daughter has died. He is, on the whole, a negative and fickle character.

Sharing this role in the novel is Farfrae, whose very name suggests that he comes from afar. This wanderer deflects Henchard's course, and he acts as an agent of Nemesis in the novel. Farfrae replaces the old mayor in the affections of the fickle townspeople. He heralds the new order, a more complex civilization, a society which Hardy was willing to sanction if it did not exploit or inhibit the stalwart rustic in his pursuit of a decent living. Henchard and Farfrae personify the old and the new. When the seed drill is introduced in Casterbridge which Henchard is mayor, old-fashioned Henchard ridicules it, saying, "'Tis impossible it should act."¹¹ But Farfrae, herald of the new, condones the invention, saying, "It will revolution the future."¹² Michael Henchard is the

¹¹ Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 219.

¹² Thomas Hardy, Mayor, p. 219.

anachronistic patriarch in a society which is substituting bookkeeping and farm machinery for personal strength.

This conflict between old and new, constant and inconstant, is shown in Tess of the D'Urbervilles. In this novel, the fake nobleman, Alec D'Urberville, is the visitor who changes the course of Tess's life and delivers her to her own destruction. In this story, Hardy indicates to us what happens when the family unit is disturbed. When John Durbeyfield dies and the family is turned out of its cottage, it is left to Tess to save them from poverty and neglect. She has two choices. She can go to the devil herself by taking up with Alec, or she can, in effect, send her family to hell by turning her back upon them. She sacrifices herself.

Tess Durbeyfield is a vulnerable working-class girl who has no outlet of resistance, and she falls victim to Alec because she is plunged into a corrupt atmosphere which she is utterly unequipped to resist. Her parents, in effect, deliver her into the hands of her betrayer and seducer. Alec functions within the community as a sexual despot. He is the agent of change who takes advantage of the breakdown of the family unit here. Hardy's purpose is to show that in the rustic community the family is the nucleus of stability; and when this structure is disturbed,

in the case of Tess, by the dictates of want and neglect, then the vitality and strength of this unit collapses.

The conflict between old and new runs all through Jude the Obscure, where Sue Bridehead's rationalism defeats Jude's old-time religious dogmas. Again, we see Hardy sympathizing with the old rather than the new, and with the rural dweller, Jude, rather than the urbanite, Sue.

In one scene Hardy attacks the traditional snobbery that assumed education to be a class privilege. When Jude, after years of preparation to enter a college in Christminster, applies to several colleges, he receives only one reply. The letter calls attention to his social class. It did not say, "Dear Sir," but only "Sir." It did not say "To Mr. Jude Fawley," period, but called attention to his place in the social hierarchy: "To Mr. J. Fawley, Stonecutter."¹³ The master rejects Jude because he is a laboring man.

In this novel there is no human visitant, but rather analogues of change and bigotry. In Christminster, the city of Jude's dreams, and in Marygreen, the place of his birth, Jude finds no solace. And so the last of Hardy's hard-driven folk perishes amid the onslaught of the

¹³ Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan, 1896), p. 363.

unproductive change that was sweeping the countryside in the nineteenth century.

Hardy addresses this mutability in the novels: the conflict between the balcony choir and the organ music in Under the Greenwood Tree; the old ideas of the mayor as opposed the new-fangled notions of young Farfrae in The Mayor of Casterbridge; the disintegration of the family unit in Tess of the D'Urbervilles; and the bigotry and intolerance espoused in Jude the Obscure. All of this is not to suggest that Thomas Hardy was not on the side of progress and advancement in the English countryside of his birth; although he lived sixty years of his life in the nineteenth century, Hardy, in many ways, was a modern man with a modern vision. His objection to the Victorian countryside was that its laws resulted in the destruction of the stable rustic community and the traditional rustic values, values which the visitants tampered with.

The three Mephistophelian visitants with whom we are chiefly concerned in this chapter are those found in Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and The Woodlanders. In Far from the Madding Crowd, Sergeant Troy, whose scarlet coat flashes in lurid lights throughout the work, is the interloper who disturbs the peace. Among other things, his wizardry with the sword and his aversion

to attending church cast him in the dim light of the preternatural. Though Damon Wildeve, in The Return of the Native, is a native to Egdon Heath, he, too, is a Hardyan visitant to the rural scene. He is a visitant because he is outside of the network of relationships so integral to community order and stability. As his name suggests, he is an element from Otherworld. He is not a church-goer, and he is fond of games; he does not subscribe to the traditional rustic piety which is the code of the heath.

Further, he in no way contributes to the upkeep of the general pastoral health. Like Wildeve, the invader in The Woodlanders, Edgar Fitzpiers, tampers with the community's well-being. Fitzpiers is modeled upon Faust, and like that figure, heralds the advent of witchery in peaceful Little Hintock.

Lascelles Abercrombie charts the repetitive pattern in Hardy's grouping of types in these three novels:

There is evident similarity of human material used in them. The central group of characters in each is a set composed of similar contrasts and similar resemblances . . . the three stories begin with almost the same set of ingredients. The similarity is especially noticeable in the cases of the men. Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, the Giles Winterborne are clearly brothers. . . . Set off against them are three instances of one kind of contrast--Troy, Wildeve, and Fitzpiers: sharp intellects, genteel manners, inflammable, faithless, passionate good-nature, and flashy disdain for rusticity. . . . They are all three,

unstable swaggering natures. . . . The females of the three groups arrange themselves into similar oppositions: Bathsheba, Eustacia, and Grace Melbury, against Fanny Robin, Thomasin Yeobright, and Marty South; on the whole, capricious, passionate, self-conscious natures--not all impatient of their rural surroundings, but all interested chiefly in their own vanity and fine-ladyism--are set against patience, simplicity, and humility.¹⁴

As examples of Bailey's Mephistophelian visitants, Sergeant Troy, Damon Wildeve, and Edgar Fitzpiers share certain telling traits. They inject chaos into otherwise peaceful pastoral arenas by seducing and betraying female rustics; they do not contribute to the general rustic effort to maintain the community in a condition of health; and they are always outside the network of relationships in the novels. They represent Hardy's human symbols of the inconstancy which swept the Victorian countryside in nineteenth-century England.

Sergeant Troy in Far from the Madding Crowd invades the stable rustic community of Weatherbury. This peaceful agricultural community is "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife and in the cool vale of sequester'd life."¹⁵

¹⁴ Lascelles Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), p. 318.

¹⁵ Thomas Gray, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," in Adventures in English Literature, ed. Rewey Belle Inglis and Josephine Spear (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1958), p. 326.

Troy, a drifting soldier who is absorbed in the moment, throws away a good education and is only superficially fascinating. He squanders his wife's money because he has no loyalties. He does not help at his wife's farm; yet he takes advantage of the harvest which the rustics have made possible.

C. P. J. Beatty points out that the first five chapters of Far from the Madding Crowd form a prologue. He goes on to suggest that this prologue provides a key to Hardy's universe by giving us a yardstick with which to measure characters and events, and he warns of possible dangers ahead for those persons who choose to ignore its basic message, namely the paramount importance of harmony.¹⁶ The sense of timelessness is all-important in Weatherbury. Allowing for a certain amount of idealism, this community faithfully represents a typical Wessex country village before the railroad has really had time to make a deep impression on its economy. Sergeant Troy disturbs this basic harmony and changelessness. He has no understanding of the agricultural world. His roots are in the military, where he has had no opportunity to establish any strong ties. He therefore is more interested in the rustics's harvest than

¹⁶ C. P. J. Beatty, "Far from the Madding Crowd: A Reassessment," in Thomas Hardy and the Modern World, ed. F. B. Pinion (Salisbury: Preface Ltd., 1974), p. 14.

he is in making it possible. The novel's preoccupation is with care of land and flocks. Troy does not fit into his pastoral atmosphere. The first real picture that we get of Troy comes in one of the shortest chapters in the novel. In "All Saints and All Souls," we find Troy standing "upright as a column"¹⁷ in the Church of All Saints awaiting Fanny Robin, who does not appear. There is some confusion as to the location of the church at which Fanny is to meet Troy. This event is significant because Fanny's tardiness allows the sergeant the opportunity to intrude into Weatherbury. Here, Hardy works to bring together Bathsheba Everdene, member of the rustic community and heiress to a large farm, and Troy. When Bathsheba and Troy meet, we are aware of two inevitabilities. One is that Bathsheba is in danger of ensnarement; the other is that the calm and unhurried life at Weatherbury is about to be disturbed.

It is evening and Bathsheba is returning to her house after making rounds on her farm. A figure is apparently on the point of gliding past her when something tugs at her skirt and pins it forcibly to the ground. This action almost throws her off her balance. In recovering she

¹⁷ Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd (London: Macmillan, 1874), p. 43.

strikes against "warm clothes and buttons."¹⁸ Bathsheba and Troy speak for the first time:

"A rum start, upon my soul," said a masculine voice, a foot or so above her head. "Have I hurt you, mate?"

"No," said Bathsheba, attempting to shrink away.

"We got hitched together somehow, I think."

"Yes."

"Are you a woman?"

"Yes."

"A lady, I should have said."

"It doesn't matter."

"I am a man."

"Oh!"¹⁹

Hardy's use of the terms "hitch" and "shrink" portends the diabolical union between these two. Hardy goes on to describe Bathsheba's reaction to her first sight of Sergeant Troy. When her lantern rays fall upon him, Bathsheba is astonished:

The man to whom she was hooked was brilliant in brass and scarlet. He was a soldier. His sudden appearance was to darkness what the sound of a trumpet is to silence. . . . The contrast of this

¹⁸ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 60.

¹⁹ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 62.

revelation with her anticipation of some sinister figure in sombre garb was so great that it had upon her the effect of a fairy transformation.²⁰

After this initial encounter, Bathsheba becomes fascinated with Troy and eventually marries him, to the dismay of the rustic community, mainly Gabriel Oak, who has long had a romantic interest in her. But before this marriage, we get one other chance to see Troy and Bathsheba together. Troy demonstrates a sword exercise to her:

In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. . . . In short, she was enclosed in a firmament of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand. . . . It may safely be asserted with respect to the closeness of the cuts, that had it been possible for the edge of the sword to leave in the air a permanent substance wherever it flew past, the space left untouched would have been almost a mould of Bathsheba's figure.²¹

Critics comment on the overt sexual elements in Troy's demonstration of this exercise, and to some degree, there is credence to this view. However, Hardy is more concerned here with the figurative ensnarement of Bathsheba, the rustic queen, and the ensuing chaotic disorder which comes of that lady's admitting an outsider into the community.

²⁰ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 74.

²¹ Thomas Hardy, Madding, 78.

Not only does Sergeant Troy ensnare Bathsheba Everdene, but he also interrupts the lives of the rustics; he seduces and betrays his wife's servant, Fanny Robin; he almost ruins Bathsheba financially; and he is in part responsible for the destruction and resulting psychosis of Boldwood, the farmer of means who loves Bathsheba to distraction. Indeed this gentleman calls Troy a "Devil, juggler of Satan, black hound."²² Because Troy has no loyalties, he allies himself with objects of his own avariciousness. He is only mildly fascinated with Bathsheba, a thing of which the rustics are immediately aware. Their evaluation of the Sergeant is not unlike that of Farmer Boldwood. On Bathsheba's marriage to Troy, the taciturn rustic Laban Tall asserts that it is "better to wed over the mixen than over the moor."²³ Another Weatherbury inmate offers his appraisal of the union: "Twill be a gallant life, but may bring some trouble between the mirth."²⁴ The rustics' keen observations are borne out.

After the interloper disturbs the peace and harmony at Weatherbury, after he seduces and betrays Fanny Robin, after he drives Boldwood to the brink of madness, after he

²² Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 106.

²³ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 200.

²⁴ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 210.

emotionally seduces his wife and uses her money in wagers, Sergeant Troy finally gets his comeuppance. He is shot by Boldwood, and a shaky peace once again settles over Weatherbury. But it is not until after death, madness, and great suffering that harmony is finally restored. It is significant that even after Troy has shaken the peace, after his death, the basic tenets of pastoralism remain the same in Weatherbury. In ridding the community of its interloper, Hardy reaffirms and re-establishes faith in the pastoral way of life.

Sergeant Troy is not unlike Damon Wildeve in The Return of the Native. The latter is a curious invader, and here, we use the term loosely because Wildeve is a native of Rainbarrow, located on Egdon Heath. In only one other of the Wessex novels does Hardy create a "native" invader. In Jude the Obscure, we meet two disturbing figures who are also residents of the rustic community. Arabella and the quack Vilbert are the closest that Hardy comes to crafting rustic villains. These two rustics exploit their own communities. But Hardy does not refrain from chastising these diabolical rustics. In the end they both get what they deserve--each other.

Damon Wildeve satisfies all of the requirements for the role of visitant in The Return of the Native. He

disturbs the peace. He seduces and betrays a rustic maiden; he makes no contribution to the general health of the community in which he lives. And he is outside the network of relationships in the novel. The prevailing atmosphere of harmony, stability, and order in Hardy's pastoral arenas is made possible largely through the efforts of the rustics whom the community serves. The introduction of an alien force into the rustic world interrupts this stability and, thereby, the lives of the rustics. Again and again in the Wessex novels, Hardy punishes the invader who dares to tamper with the pastoral peace. To do so, he sometimes enlists the help of nature. In the rustics' universe, nature is often perceived as a positive source of strength. This is certainly the case in Far from the Madding Crowd, which is in itself a sketch of pastoral beauty. However, this is not the case in The Return of the Native, where nature is neither positive nor friendly. Note Hardy's description of Egdon Heath:

It was a place perfectly accordant with man's nature--neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly, neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but like man, slighted and enduring.²⁵

²⁵ Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 141.

Hardy's description of the heath may be found misleading. He does not suggest that the heath represents a destructive force for all of the characters; it does not. Heath dwellers are not overwhelmed or destroyed by Egdon as is Eustacia Vye, the woman for whom Wildeve sins; as is Mrs. Yeobright, that lady who considers herself superior to the other inhabitants of the heath and therefore unsuited to her surroundings; and as is Damon Wildeve, the gamster and the exploiter who taints whatever he touches. Douglas Brown holds that "only those who have succeeded in forming the right kind of relationship with the heath survive"; and he goes on to suggest that "the eventual survivors are those who have been slighted and yet have the strength to endure."²⁶

Damon Wildeve does not endure. While he resides in this semi-agricultural community, he is not of it. His parasitic nature upsets the balance of the heath. He marries the native Thomasin to the dismay of the rustic Diggory Venn, for whom she has already been spoken. This match is, of course, an ill-advised one because Wildeve is more concerned with his wife's small inheritance than he is with forming any romantic alliance with her. Indeed, he

²⁶ Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy (London: Longman, 1954), p. 47.

gamblers away this money with the local dim-wit, Christian Cantle. Cantle has been entrusted with the money by Mrs. Yeobright, Thomasin's aunt. Christian is instructed to put the money safely into the hands of her niece. Wildeve's fickle loyalties to his wife can best be illustrated in the following nocturnal scene in which he persuades Christian to engage in wagers, using the guineas as bounty:

You ought to win some money, now that you've got them. Any woman would marry you then. Now is your time, Christian, and I would recommend you not let it slip. Some men are born to luck, some are not. I belong to the latter class.²⁷

The money is later retrieved by the faithful and long-suffering rustic, Diggory Venn, but that is the subject of another chapter.

Wildeve betrays his wife with another outsider, Eustacia Vye. This "queen of night and courtly pretender"²⁸ is also outside the network of relationships in the novel. Eustacia's native place is Budsmouth, a fashionable seaside resort. No wonder she is impatient of her surroundings and longs for the splendor of Paris. Also setting her outside

²⁷ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 332.

²⁸ David Eggenschwiller, "Eustacia Vye, Queen of Night and Courtly Pretender," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 21 (1945), 156-64.

the network of relationships in Rainbarrow is the fact that her grandfather is the local regimental hero. This gives her some small claim to nobility.

The clandestine meetings of Wildeve and Eustacia disturb the lives of many of Hardy's folk. Included among these rustics is the worthy Venn, whose love for Thomasin is unshakable; the native Clym Yeobright, whose wife it is that Wildeve tampers with; Thomasin, to whom Wildeve is unfaithful; and Johnny Nunsuch, the fire-watch, hired by Eustacia to signal Wildeve to their appointed place of meeting. Eustacia and Wildeve choose to ignore the basic message of the rustic universe, namely the paramount importance of harmony and order. Their punishment for this infraction is destruction by the heath, the great equalizer in this novel.

On the night that the two lovers plan to meet and elope, they are destroyed by the heath. Wildeve and Eustacia die in a pool of "boiling cauldron"²⁹ on the heath, she, by suicide, and he, in an attempt to save her. Because they fail to form the right kind of relationship with the heath and its inhabitants, they perish. Significantly, Thomasin, child of the heath, does not fear Egdon when she on the same night, hoping to interrupt the elopement,

²⁹ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 421.

searches for her husband. Although Egdon wears its most sinister face on this terrible night, she has no fear for herself or her child, whom she carries in her arms:

Yet in spite of all this Thomasin was not sorry she had started. To her there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy, wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the path without care, and possibly catch cold.³⁰

After the twin deaths of the two visitant lovers, a shaky and uneasy peace is restored to the community, and great Egdon is once again silent. This vast moor is once again home and hearth to the rustic who knows and understands it.

The third and last visitant with whom we are concerned here is Edgar Fitzpiers, the diabolical agent in The Woodlanders. Like his literary kinsmen in Hardy, Fitzpiers breaks the pastoral peace and thereby breaks the law established by Hardy for this universe. Again like them, he does not heed the warning that the wages for defying the harmony of the rustic community are destruction. He does not understand the code.

³⁰ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 433.

Fitzpiers intrudes into the autumnal beauty of Little Hintock. Like his Faustian relative, Fitzpiers comes unannounced and by night. He is a doctor given to the practice of an experimental medicine which is incomprehensible to the basic rustic mentality.

It is interesting to note the rustics' initial assessment of this invader. Here, a rustic matron confides to the barber Percombe her superstitious notions on the subject:

A very clever and learned young doctor lives in the place you be going to--not because there's anybody for'n to cure there, but because he is in league with Devil.³¹

Cawtree speculates to Mr. Melbury, who later admits the invader into his family:

It seems that our new neighbor, this young Doctor What's-his-name, is a strange, deep perusing gentleman; and there is reason for supposing he has sold his soul to the wicked one.³²

And Grammer Oliver, the archetypal rustic mother, confides to Grace Melbury about the new arrival:

And yet he's a project, a real project, and says the oddest of rozums. "Ah," Grammer, he

³¹ Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 65.

³² Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 56.

said . . . "let me tell you that Everything is Nothing. There's only Me and Not-Me in the whole world." And he told me that no man's hands could help what they did, any more than the hands of a clock. . . . Yes, he's a man of strange meditations, and his eyes seem to see as far as the north star.³³

Allowing for a little melodrama here, Hardy clearly establishes the sinister and diabolical aura which surrounds Fitzpiers during his sojourn in Little Hintock. Indeed his future bride, Grace Melbury, is first made aware of Fitzpiers by noticing the strange light in his house late at night. The doctor is here engaged in his awful experimentations during the early hours of the morning. Fitzpiers' nocturnal experimentations excite intrigue and fascination in Grace Melbury. Like other women in Hardy she is a rustic maiden, who, by reason of her superior education and tastes, has been elevated slightly above her other rustic neighbors. Like Bathsheba Everdene and Thomasin Yeobright, Grace Melbury raises her marital expectation above the level of the common and faithful rustic to whom she has been promised. A match with Giles Winterborne no longer attracts her after Fitzpiers makes his appearance. Like Sergeant Troy, the doctor makes some claims to nobility; his mother was a member of an old family, a wealthy

33 Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 56.

one. This link to aristocracy turns the head of Melbury, and so he arranges the marriage between his daughter and Fitzpiers. It is an ill-suited match because Fitzpiers, like Troy and Wildeve, has nothing but disdain for his wife's ties to rusticity.

Richard Beckman writes that Hardy's method is one of "experimental placement of different types into the Hardyan universe to see how they will behave."³⁴ As we can see, the rustic endures, and those outside the network of relationships do not survive because they cannot endure; they are oblivious to the rustic code. This code is anchored in a strong common sense. The rustic, who is aware of the code, knows the rules which govern his universe; and he conducts himself accordingly. He understands that his role in the community is to help to promote the harmony and order therein. He does not struggle against the natural order of life. He keeps the peace.

Fitzpiers does not keep the peace; he acts out the dictates of his villainous role. He marries Grace, but he does not keep the marriage vow. He thwarts the efforts of Giles Winterborne to woo his rustic maiden. He plays a game of deviltry with poor Grammer Oliver by bidding for

³⁴ Richard Beckman, "Thomas Hardy," Journal of English Literary History, 30 (1947), 40-57.

that poor soul's brain, a condition of a monetary bargain which he strikes with her. Beckman sees analogues of Fitzpiers in the "vegetable world, the twisted trees of little Hintock."³⁵ Clearly this interloper does not belong in this scene of pastoral beauty. He wreaks havoc in too many lives. Timothy Tangs is a case in point.

Timothy is a native who is betrothed to Suke Damson, a coarse rustic maiden. Fitzpiers disturbs this union by engaging in an affair with this girl. But he is never really serious about Suke. And the wronged lover, Timothy, does attempt to avenge his honor, unsuccessfully setting a mantrap for the doctor.

The doctor's real extra-marital involvement is with Mrs. Charmond, the local lady of means. This creature fits into the world of the interloper because she is of the same breed. She, too, ignores the rustic code, a regulation which she holds in disdain. She, too, interrupts the pastoral harmony. And she, too, must be punished. Mrs. Charmond gets her comeuppance when she is killed by a crazed lover from her past; Fitzpiers is chastised for disturbing the balance and order in Little Hintock--he experiences spiritual death.

³⁵ Beckman, p. 47.

And so for Troy, Wildeve, and Fitzpiers, brothers in irresponsible action, not very much more can be said.

Warner Taylor writes:

About them there is much of the contemptible; they are weak with a pronounced turn for deviltry. Their emotions are unstable, and their conscience uncontrolled. Their presence in the world of women brings disaster. Like their other relatives in Hardy, they live only in the day before them, recalling nothing of the past and singularly without a sense of tomorrow. . . . Together they offer a natural contrast to Oak, Venn, and Winterborne, men who place the happiness of the women they love above that of their own.³⁶

These three colorful men of character do not ascribe to the law of the rustic arena; they are therefore unsuited for life there. And so they are expelled from grace by the rustic heroes, the caretakers of the pastoral peace.

³⁶ Warner Taylor, "Introduction," in The Return of the Native (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. xxiii.

CHAPTER IV

CARPENTER'S GLUE

Hardy's caretakers of the pastoral peace, Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne are powerfully conceived and developed, and they carry about their every action a consistency central to their natures. Warner Taylor holds that

One leaves the darkened theater of their dramas--they are all tragic figures--convinced of the rightfulness of their humanity, of the fact that the potter's wheel which shaped them turned true.¹

On terminating a novel, Thackeray, whose brain-children gripped his own imagination strongly, said of the characters therein, "I can still hear their voices."² We experience this same feeling of complete possession based on our own grasp and understanding of the peacemakers in Hardy. Hardy's peacemakers are always of lowly birth, and the finest of these are always close to the soil. Gabriel Oak, Diggory Venn, and Giles Winterborne are men of character.

¹ Warner Taylor, "Introduction," in The Return of the Native (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. xiii.

² Taylor, p. xxii.

They are patient, earnest, and capable, almost symbols of self-sacrifice. They epitomize "upright, elemental characters who hold the love they easily win from us."³ It is not by chance that Hardy drew on the simple countryside for these children of his real affection. They represent life untouched by urban encroachment and complexity. These characters "grow like trees toward heaven and run their courses, simply, evenly, like rivers, to the final ocean. . . . He [Hardy] does not spare them the travail of life, but he bestows upon them the power to endure it."⁴ Thus it is that the Hardyan rustic does endure, while the other characters do not because they cannot; they are unequipped for life in the rustic universe.

Abercrombie makes a useful point when he observes that Hardy creates repetitive pattern in his grouping of character types in Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and The Woodlanders. In these works, the sturdy rustic men--Oak, Venn, and Winterborne--are opposed to the unstable urban visitants--Troy, Wildeve, and Fitzpiers; in a similar fashion, the rustic women--Bathsheba, Thomasin, and Marty South--are pitted against the more sophisticated

³ Taylor, pp. xxvi.

⁴ Taylor, p. xxvii.

figures such as Eustacia Vye and Mrs. Charmond. By juxtaposing his rustics with his less savory characters, Hardy sharpens our perception of his countrymen. Without their urban counterparts, the rustics would not appear as valid and as strong as they do.

Oak, Venn, and Winterborne share three attributes. They share a certain rustic personal semblance; each has an elemental sympathy with nature; and each places the happiness of the woman whom he loves above his own.

The first rustic who warrants analysis here is Oak, the romanticist, the archetypal countryman, and the traditional good shepherd. He is strong and simple, resourceful, and loyal to his woman. He understands his environment. There is something about Oak's appearance which calls up Biblical associations. Hardy, in drawing this figure, enlists the aid of heavenly bodies, the moon, the stars, and the sun. Evidence of this notion may be found in the vocabulary which Hardy uses in his description of Oak, the man who has already achieved inner harmony:

When he smiled his face looked like a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun; he felt himself to occupy morally that vast middle space of Laodicean neutrality . . . or, to state his character as it stood in the scale of public opinion, . . . he

was a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture.⁵

In his remarkable description of the stars at night in the second chapter, Hardy writes:

The sky was clear--remarkably clear--and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse.⁶

If we then connect the harmony of the constellations with Gabriel Oak, we may be permitted to anticipate a little and point out that the word "meteor" conveys the uncertainty of all that is related to Troy. And it is surely Bathsheba's lesson that she should eventually be able to distinguish between the flash of a meteor and the steady glow of a real star.⁷

Oak's archetypal calling is stressed by Hardy's description of the shepherd's hut as "a small Noah's ark."⁸ This structure on wheels suggests the practical, the flexible,

⁵ Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd (London: Macmillan, 1874), p. 43.

⁶ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 9.

⁷ C. J. P. Beatty, "Far from the Madding Crowd: A Reassessment," in Thomas Hardy and the Modern World, ed. F. B. Pinion (Salisbury: Preface Ltd., 1974), p. 24.

⁸ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 15.

and the timeless, all keynotes in Hardy's description of his rustics. It is in such humble dwellings that Giles Winterborne dies and Henchard comes to his end on the heath. It is significant that Bathsheba saves Oak's life at the beginning of the novel by throwing warm milk over his face as he lies asleep in the hut in danger of suffocation. This action can be taken as symbolic of their future union, one which cannot be solemnized until Bathsheba is willing to call on Oak again in his humble cottage at the end of the novel, thereby acknowledging that the pastoral way of life is still valid. That Oak fundamentally belongs to this pastoral setting is evident in Hardy's description of him:

Oak 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, and he had not yet arrived at the stage wherein they become united again, in the character of prejudice, by the influence of a wife and family.⁹

Oak is strength, stability, and harmony.

When we first meet Oak, he is in the depths of despair. Like that certain other Biblical symbol of patience and pertinacity, Oak has lost all of his possessions. In a

⁹ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 28.

chain of pure circumstances, Oak's faithful dog has driven the shepherd's sheep to their death at the bottom of a precipice. But like his scriptural kinsman, Oak refuses to curse his fate. Merryn Williams writes:

For the Hardy hero like Gabriel Oak, there is no real predicament because whatever disasters may hit him he will carry on stoically and without self-pity, doing the work at hand.¹⁰

Oak is the kind of hero whom Hardy admired. Hardy's heroes are imbued with that sterling virtue of rural character described in The Mayor of Casterbridge, when Henchard declares with stoic stubbornness that "my punishment is not greater than I can bear."¹¹ And so does Oak bear his troubles. After the disaster, he sells his hut and other property, pays his debts, and seeks work in nearby Weatherbury.

Oak takes a position on the farm of Bathsheba Everdene, who has recently inherited a large farm. Here, Oak distinguishes himself as a diligent and skilled worker. Bathsheba later dismisses Oak from her services, when in his typical candor, he advises her concerning a personal

¹⁰ Merryn Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England (London: Macmillan Press, 1972), p. 201.

¹¹ Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Macmillan, 1886), p. 348.

matter. But Bathsheba soon discovers that the shepherd is indispensable; she pleads with him to return and rescue her sheep which have strayed into a field of clover and blasted themselves. He does not come at once as she has been rather too peremptory in her demands. However, a second message is delivered to him which ends with the line: "Do not desert me, Gabriel."¹² Beatty observes that this is the kind of phrase that we use to address God.¹³ Apparently, Shepherd Oak is re-establishing himself as pastoral king. Such pleading also shows how important to society the man is who knows his job and can perform it well. Here Gabriel employs the craft that he knows so well:

Gabriel was already among the turgid prostrate forms. He had flung off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and taken from his pocket the instrument of salvation. It was a small tube or trochar, with a lance passing down the inside; and Gabriel began to use it with a dexterity that would have graced a hospital-surgeon. Passing his hand over the sheep's left flank, and selecting the proper point, he punctured the skin and rumen with the lance as it stood in the tube; then he suddenly withdrew the lance, retaining the tube in its place. A current of air rushed up the tube, forcible enough to have extinguished a candle held at the orifice.¹⁴

¹² Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 267.

¹³ Beatty, p. 21.

¹⁴ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 270.

And so the greater part of Bathsheba's flock is saved. Hardy's main concern here is to show us Oak's elemental sympathy with and inherent knowledge of nature. We see the shepherd's pride in his craft.

In the novel there are other memorable rustic scenes. Three other great pastoral scenes are the sheep-washing, the sheep-shearing, and the shearing supper. These scenes set the rural tone and show the distinctive character of rural life. They supply a kind of country rhythm for the background of the surface plot. Moreover, these scenes reveal Hardy's theme of contrast, urban and rural. In these scenes, we find Shepherd Oak and several other rustic men engaged in the care of sheep. These rustics are in their element. Significantly, by way of contrast, Hardy places in each of these scenes a personage who is outside of this element, a purely rustic element. At times the outsider is Farmer Boldwood, the local man of means; at times Sergeant Troy is set in the midst of the purely rustic world; he is clearly the alien force here. And importantly, the outsider is often Bathsheba Everdene herself; she, for one brief season, is outside the network of relationships which have been established in the novel. These "outsiders" underscore Hardy's thesis that the urban Other-world is the disturbing influence in the rustic arena.

At the sheep-washing in Chapter XIX, we witness two worlds--the rustic one and the one symbolized by Bathsheba and her suitor, Boldwood. They observe the sheep-tending:

Boldwood went meditating down the slopes with his eyes on his boots. . . . A tributary of the main stream flowed through the basin of the pool by an inlet at opposite points of its diameter. Shepherd Oak, Jan Coggan, Moon, Poorgrass, Cainy Ball, and several others were assembled here, all dripping wet to the very roots of their hair, and Bathsheba was standing by in a new riding habit--the most elegant she had ever worn--the reins of her horse being looped over her arm. Flagons of cider were rolling about upon the green. The meek sheep were pushed into the pool by Coggan and Matthew Moon, who stood by the lower hatch, immersed to their waists; then Gabriel, who stood on the brink, thrust them under as they swam along, with an instrument like a crutch, formed for the purpose, and also for assisting the exhausted animals when the wool became saturated and they began to sink. They were let out against the stream, and through the upper opening, all impurities flowing away below. Cainy Ball and Joseph, who performed this latter operation were if possible wetter than the rest; they resembled dolphins under a fountain, every protuberance and angle of their clothes dribbling forth a small rill.¹⁵

Hardy's description of this rustic chore is earthy and pridefully fitting to these earth-dwellers who perform it. These men are in their element, and they are unabashed that the lady and the gentleman witness their joy in their work. This is a rustic scene, and it is Bathsheba and Boldwood

¹⁵ Thomas Hardy, Madding, pp. 142-3.

who are intruders here. The incongruity of their presence is underscored by Hardy's comments about Bathsheba's attire. Clearly, she and the farmer do not belong here; Boldwood never did, but Bathsheba has allowed herself to be drawn away from the agricultural world to which she fundamentally belongs. At the shearing-supper, Hardy continues this technique of placing an outsider in the Hardyan universe to underscore that character's ineptitude for the rustic life. Sergeant Troy is present at the last two events; he takes advantage of the bountiful table that has been spread. He drinks too much and offers these intoxicants to the rustic company. He ignores his wife's protests, and soon he and most of the workers are completely inebriated. Only Oak, the good shepherd, does not partake. This scene contrasts the firm Oak, who is as resilient as the tree whose name he bears, to the amoral Troy, who is a fickle and as deceptive as that mythical lady for whom he is named.

This is Oak's finest hour. A thunderstorm is brewing, and Oak goes to warn his employer. Troy ignores the warning because he cannot know that the "birthright of a skilled shephard is the foretelling of matters of weather."¹⁶ And so Gabriel heads toward home, but stalls as he sees more signs and symptoms of the approaching storm:

¹⁶ Ruth Firor, Folkways in Thomas Hardy (Philadelphia: Univ. of Penn. Press, 1931), p. 73.

In approaching the door, he toe kicked something which felt soft and leathery, and distended, like a boxing-glove. It was a large toad humbly travelling across the path. Oak took it up, thinking it might be better to kill the creature to save it from pain; but finding it uninjured, he placed it again among the grass. He knew what this direct me-sage from the great Mother meant. And soon came another.¹⁷

Hardy goes on to list other signs which Oak notes, signs of the coming storm; two black spiders promenading the ceiling of his hut; the sheep's crowding close together and their lack of fear at his approach. At this point the good shepherd illustrates his basic goodness and generosity of spirit. He gives himself to the task of saving the wheat crop belonging to that lady whom he adores. As she makes her nightly rounds, Bathsheba comes upon him tending to her business and aids him in the delicate task. The scene in which these two work together to save the crop from the storm is but a prelude to their later union:

Bathsheba instantly took a sheaf upon her shoulder, clambered up close to his heels, placed it behind the rod, and descended for another. At her third descent the rick suddenly brightened with the brazen glare of shining majolica--every knot in every straw was visible. On the slope in front of him appeared two human shapes, black as jet. The rick lost its sheen--the shapes vanished. Gabriel turned his head. It had been the

¹⁷ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 277.

sixth flash which had come from the east behind him, and the two dark forms on the slope had been the shadows of himself and Bathsheba.¹⁸

The crop is saved and Bathsheba and Oak are brought closer together. With Troy's death and Boldwood's reprieve from hanging on a plea of madness, Bathsheba is forced to reassess the worthy and sturdy rustic whom she has heretofore ignored so completely. Beatty writes:

Before the novel can end . . . the homestead has to bend its knee to the humble cottage; Bathsheba has to seek out Gabriel in his house in the village. . . . But Gabriel could never have entered the homestead as master until the harmony within . . . equaled the harmony without. Bathsheba lives, the whirlpool has done its work, the river again flows even and true.¹⁹

Surely Oak is one of Hardy's best characters. He is drawn with both sympathy and insight. Throughout his many tribulations, Oak remains the "captain of his soul."²⁰ He is the indispensable and the characteristic figure in those rural scenes which form so large a part of the novel. It is this kindly shepherd who wakes in the hut to take up the newborn lamb revived by warmth of his fire; who stands

¹⁸ Thomas Hardy, Madding, p. 286.

¹⁹ Beatty, p. 34.

²⁰ W. M. Conacher, "Thomas Hardy as Regional Novelist," Queen's Quarterly, 35 (1928), 271-87.

sorrowfully on the brow of the hill beneath which lie the mangled carcasses of his flock; who lances the stricken beasts with his own sure and merciful hand to save their lives; who presides at the sheep-shearing in the great barn; who reads with trained eyes the signs of the approaching storm; who saves the wheat-ricks from fire and rain; and who with his patience and diligence wins Bathsheba's heart and hand. After the disturbance by the interloper, it is Gabriel Oak's comely dignity and innate strength which reconstitutes the balance and harmony at Weatherbury.

In The Return of the Native, we meet Oak's brother in responsible action. The peacemaker, Diggory Venn, has the stamp of rusticity upon his brow. Like Oak, he is no stranger to the doings of nature. And he unabashedly loves and is loyal to Thomasin. The reddleman's kind and unselfish devotion to Thomasin is akin to Oak's fidelity to Bathsheba. Venn is well-adapted to life on the heath; nature works on his side because he relates to it. Although he suffers mightily in the novel, he is rewarded for his castigation in the end; he is, along with his rustic brethren, still on friendly terms with the heath at the end of the novel. Hardy employs natural phenomena in describing Venn as he does in his description of Oak:

The reddleman . . . was an instance of pleasing being wasted to form the ground-work of the singular, when an ugly foundation would have done just as well for purpose. The one point that was forbidding about this reddleman was his color. Freed from that he would have been as agreeable a specimen of rustic manhood as one would often see. . . . Moreover, after looking at him, one would have hazarded the guess that good-nature, and an accurateness as extreme as it could be without verging on craft, formed the frame-work of his character.²¹

Bailey and other critics point to the red hue which covers the skin of the reddleman; they indicate that this coloration suggests the preternatural and that Venn is the brother of other visitants in Hardy.²² Hardy would take exception to this premise. After all, Venn's creator calls him "a specimen of rustic manhood." If Venn were indeed an "apple of discord," we would not find him again and again in the novel on the side of the rustic, the same camp in which Hardy resides. The reddleman represents a bygone era; he personifies Hardy's nostalgia for an older, simpler, more agrarian way of life that was being swept away by the advance of the Industrial Revolution.

John Hagan sees two sides to Venn's nature. On the one hand there is his basic goodness of heart and will.

²¹ Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (London: Macmillan, 1878), p. 18.

²² James Bailey, "Astrology? Stars, Sun, and Moon as Symbols in Hardy's Works," English Language Transition, 14 (1971), 219-22.

The latter side of Venn's nature is, according to Hagan, Hardy's concern.²³ Hardy's purpose is to cast Venn as the cool-headed young man whose calmness and simplicity set to rights the doings of the interloper, personified in Wildeve, the innkeeper.

It has already been mentioned that Diggory Venn's efforts to win the woman whom he loves are interrupted by Damon Wildeve, the heath visitant. The ubiquitous reddleman, like the typical Hardy hero, simply stands aside until his time comes. Like Oak, Venn is ignored by the rustic maiden who has been temporarily blinded by the visitant from Otherworld. After Thomasin marries Wildeve, Venn, like the good shepherd, melts into the background, displaying the virtue of adjustment to circumstances. In many ways, he plays the role of Thomasin's guardian angel. He is never far away when her interests are being threatened by the visitants. He employs subterfuge in support of his aims, and he displays a grim satirical turn of mind on four occasions. His intentions in each instance are the best.

Here, the selfless peacemaker appeals to Eustacia Vye to leave Rainbarrow, lest she destroy the marriage of Thomasin and Wildeve:

²³ John Hagan, "A Note on the Significance of Diggory Venn," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 16 (1961), 150.

Eustacia seemed to feel, after a bare look at Diggory Venn, that the man had come on a strange errand and that he was not so mean as she had thought him; for her close approach did not cause him to writhe uneasily, or shift his feet, or show any of those little signs which escape an ingenuous rustic at the advent of the uncommon in womankind. . . .²⁴

Eustacia is remarkably vain in her assessment of her charms. But Venn completely disregards her womanhood. His concern is saving the union of his beloved and the man whom she has married. Hardy also suggests here that his rustics are capable of placing matters of the head above that of the heart. Venn makes his plea:

"I have made so bold, miss, as to step across and tell you some strange news that has come to my ears about that man."

"Ah! what man?"

He jerked his elbow to south-east--the direction of the Quiet Woman.

Eustacia turned quickly to him. "Do you mean Mr. Wildeve?"

"Yes, there is trouble in a household on account of him, and I have come to let you know of it, because I believe you might have some power to drive it away."

Of course, Eustacia rejects Venn's appeal and remains in Rainbarrow, thereby threatening the union between Thomasin

²⁴ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 38.

²⁵ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 38.

and Wildeve. Through his appeal to Eustacia, Venn demonstrates his "passive firmness, self-denying fidelity, and patient watchfulness."²⁶ Although he has lost the woman, the reddleman continues to guard her best interests.

On another occasion, Diggory intervenes in the major action in an attempt to protect Thomasin. We have already mentioned that Venn retrieves the money from Wildeve after the latter has won it in wagers. Unknown to Wildeve, Venn hears the exchange between the dim-witted Christian Cantle and the interloper. After Christian departs, having lost all of the money to Wildeve, the elusive reddleman comes forward:

Wildeve stared. Venn looked towards Wildeve, and without a word being spoken, he deliberately sat himself down where Christian had been seated, and thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out a sovereign, and laid it on the stone.²⁷

Venn retrieves the ill-gotten bounty and returns it to Thomasin. But he is not finished with his timely interventions, his setting to rights the doings of the visitant, Damon Wildeve. On another occasion Venn interrupts a clandestine meeting of the two lovers, thereby forcing the two to cut short their rendezvous.

²⁶ Carl Weber, "An Elizabethan Basis for a Hardy Tale?--An Addendum," PMLA, 55 (1957), 600.

²⁷ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 210.

The reddleman's final intervention takes place on the night that Eustacia and Wildeve die on Egdon Heath. Venn has been warned that the lovers will on this night attempt to leave Egdon together. Had this flight taken place, Venn would have been free to marry Thomasin. But here Hardy underscores the reddleman's essential selflessness and his unfailing devotion to his rustic quenn. It is Venn who dives into the pool of "boiling cauldron"²⁸ in an attempt to save the stricken lovers. He comes up with only their bodies. In his simple mentality, the reddleman cannot know that his efforts are futile because Hardy means to punish these two disturbers of the bucolic harmony. The wages for their sins are death, destruction by the heath. The events which occur on the heath on the night of the deaths of the interlopers underscore yet another sterling quality of the reddleman.

This quality is emphasized when we initially meet him. He is a reddleman, a pedlar of sheep's dye; he therefore is a country dweller, and he has some knowledge of the care of flocks. Importantly, Venn is the only character in the novel who is connected to agriculture. If we then connect the reddleman's occupation to Hardy's own pre-occupation

²⁸ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 389.

with the Dorset of yesteryear, we then can accept Evelyn Hardy's thesis that Venn is used in the novel as one of the symbols of a "vanished poetic past."²⁹ The reddleman's archaic occupation testifies to

. . . the world he [Hardy] knew, the world he had lived in, the English countryside in the half-century between the repeal of the Corn Laws and the tragedy of Tess, a Wessex which was slipping out of his fingers, changing shape beyond what he remembered from his youth, receding into history; he was putting on record a history which he had lived on his pulses. . . .³⁰

Hardy's sympathy with the old order in Dorset is also evident in his comments about the reddleman's trade:

Reddlemen of the old school are now but seldom seen. Since the introduction of the railways, Wessex farmers have managed to do without these reddlemen, and the bright pigment so largely used by shepherds in preparing sheep for the fair is obtained by other routes. Even those who yet survive are losing the poetry of their existence which characterized them when the pursuit of trade meant periodical journeys to the pit whence the material was dug, a regular camping out from month to month. . . .³¹

Hardy here salutes the hard-driven rustic who appreciates hard work and who is willing to go the extra mile to achieve

²⁹ Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), p. 69.

³⁰ R. J. White, Thomas Hardy and History (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), p. 45.

³¹ Thomas Hardy, Native, p. 15.

excellence in his trade. These men, suggests Hardy, are the true Dorset legacy because they know the land and understand the true meaning of honest striving, a thing which is incomprehensible to the urban visitant who interrupts their lives. Douglas Brown agrees:

The reddleman seems to personify the interplay between ballad-tale and the country environment that give Hardy's novels their unique quality. . . . He [the reddleman] 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 feelings for the country at the time, and that way of life fast disappearing. At times, a dream-like quality enfolds him, a poetry of existence, suggesting an unchecked, regressive nostalgia in Hardy.³²

The reddleman's paramount role in the novel is that of peacekeeper, and his reward for keeping this peace on Egdon Heath is the union with Thomasin. But only after loss of life and great suffering is order restored to the rustic universe. The survivors are those who are, like Thomasin and Venn, in harmony with the law of the heath. These survivors do not struggle against the natural order of life as do their urban counterparts. Hagan holds that Venn is

. . . a foil to the more tempestuous characters of . . . Eustacia and Wildeve--an image of the

³² Douglas Brown, Thomas Hardy (London: Longman, 1954), p. 47.

calmness and the spirit of renunciation characteristic of one who has accepted his place in both nature and society.³³

Venn and Thomasin achieve a "serene contentment which is awarded those who submitted themselves to circumstances."³⁴ Of course, Thomasin and Venn cannot solemnize their union until the community has rid itself of its negative influences. Further, the rustic maiden must have her scene of recognition in which she finally comes to realize that there is value in the worthy striving rustic who loves her. She must re-align herself as well as her loyalties to the rustic community to which she fundamentally belongs. She must re-establish her ties to rusticity; like Bathsheba before her, Thomasin's reunion with the rustic society reaffirms the idea that the pastoral way of life is still valid. After teaching her a lesson, Hardy then sanctions the union between her and Diggory Venn, the pastoral peacekeeper.

The last peacemaker with whom we are concerned here is Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders. Giles is a modest planter of trees, a creator of landscapes. His sacrificial temperament finds no fulfillment in the novel. And after

³³ Hagan, p. 43.

³⁴ Harvey C. Webster, On A Darkling Plain (Chicago: Univ. Press, 1968), p. 85.

his death, we are left with only the memory of his goodness, represented in the trees that he has planted. In drawing Giles, Hardy enlists the bits and pieces of nature which he also employs in describing his rustic brothers. "He is a fruit god,"³⁵ writes Hardy. Like Oak and Venn, Giles possesses an elemental knowledge of nature, and he places the well-being of his lady above his own. His is the supreme sacrifice. He gives his life.

Giles Winterborne is a plain countryman who is skilled in woodland lore. He is honest and courteous and kind. Perhaps his chief distinction is his simple refinement and his habitual reverence. He bears his blows with unbroken sorrowful dignity; he accepts his lot in a manner not unlike the way in which the earlier Hardyman heroes accept theirs. Lionel Johnson speculates that in weak hands such a character as Giles would have also been weak: the rustic lover, unsuccessful in love, would have been either sullen or frantic.³⁶ But there is none of this weakness in Giles Winterborne; he is strong because in him there is much of the Henchard philosophy, much of the stoic's code. He endures.

³⁵ Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan, 1887), p. 89.

³⁶ Lionel Johnson, The Art of Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1894), p. 95.

Early in the novel, Hardy connects the secluded and unchanging loveliness of Little Hintock to the reserved and stable protagonist. Hardy describes the woodlands:

The rambler who, for old association or other reasons, should trace the forsaken coach-road running almost in a meridional line from Bristol to the south shore of England would find himself during the latter part of his journey in the vicinity of some extensive woodlands, interspersed with apple orchards. Here the trees, timber or fruit-bearing as the case may be, make the wayside hedges ragged by their drip and shade, stretching over the road with easeful horizontality, as if they found the unsubstantial air an adequate support for their limbs. At one place, where a hill is crossed, the largest of the woods shows bisected by the highway, as the head of thick hair is bisected by the white line of its parting. The spot is lonely.³⁷

And Hardy writes of Winterborne, the woodlander:

He had a marvelous power of making trees grow. . . . 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. . . . He put most of these towards the south-west; for he said, in forty years' time, when some great gale is blowing from that quarter, the trees will require the strongest holdfast on that side to stand against it and not fall.³⁸

Giles's wonderful skill and his intuitive understanding of nature are shown here. It is only fitting that he should

37 Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 1.

38 Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 6.

be here in this bastion of loveliness. The fruit god's masterly handling of the woodland work sets him apart from the worldly Fitzpiers, the local physician, philosopher, and libertine. This visitant interrupts the futile efforts of Giles in the latter's attempt to win Grace, the rustic maiden whose father's admiration for the upper classes and what he considers their superior refinement and culture leads him to sacrifice his daughter:

That touching faith in members of long-established families as such, irrespective of their personal condition and character, which is still found among old-fashioned people in the rural districts, reached its full perfection in Melbury.³⁹

Here, Hardy chastises Grace's father for failing to recognize Fitzpiers' perfidy. That the doctor is of aristocratic descent while Giles Winterborne is a low-born rustic all but seals the union between Grace and the doctor.

The situation in this novel is reminiscent of situations described in Far from the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native. The rustic maiden allows an outsider to intrude into the community, an essentially agricultural world; the intruder, in turn, exploits the rural world instead of helping to maintain the balance and harmony therein.

39 Thomas Hardy, The Woodlands, p. 79.

Hardy's rustics are charged with keeping the peace in the rural arena. And they do. Winterborne retires to the background action, after Grace marries Fitzpiers, thereby demonstrating his ability to adapt to circumstances. Giles, like the true rustic, does not struggle against the natural order of life; he accepts his lot with stoic stature. Giles Winterborne is

. . . an illustration of the way of life that makes living endurable even when it is faced by the worst contingencies. . . . [Winterborne] does not rebel unnecessarily; . . . in short, he is an exponent of the opinion that the best way of life is that which accepts the most and expects the least.⁴⁰

But though Winterborne bears his lot stoically, he is never far away when the interests of Grace are threatened. He never thinks unkindly of her after she chooses the doctor over him. His selflessness is one of his sterling traits. But it would appear that Grace has never been suited to Giles, for there is no happy union in their futures.

The plotting in this novel differs markedly from that of each of the other works under consideration here. In Far from the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, Hardy deals with problem marriages in a perhaps too fictional way. Bathsheba and Thomasin both make unhappy

⁴⁰ Webster, p. 33.

marriages; but in each instance, Hardy makes certain that the unsuitable partner dies, thereby leaving the rustic free to re-marry within her own community. In this novel, Fitzpiers stays alive, and Grace has to make the best of an ill-advised choice. Hardy chooses not to allow Grace Melbury the option of seeing the error of her ways and of re-uniting with the rustic world to which she essentially belongs. In The Woodlanders, the good, faithful, and long-suffering Giles Winterborne is the one who dies. In effect, he sacrifices his own life for the woman that he loves.

After the wayward Fitzpiers ties of his paramour, Mrs. Charmond, and wants to return to his wife, Grace flees her father's house lest she face the villain. It is to Winterborne that she runs. The scene in which she goes again to his humble cottage, an abode which she has scorned, a humble dwelling which she views as offensive to her sensibilities, makes a strong point. Her going to Winterborne's lowly hut is not unlike the journey which Bathsheba Everdene embarks upon when she goes again to the cottage of Gabriel Oak in the earlier novel. Bathsheba's journey to Oak's dwelling reaffirms the notion, strong in Hardy, that the pastoral way of life is still valid. Not so in the woodland tale.

So that he will not compromise Grace's reputation, Giles leaves his cottage and retires to a mean lean-to in

the woods. Grace is left alone in his hut. But a terrible storm is brewing; unfortunately, Winterborne has a chill, and this sacrifice for Grace only further weakens him. A day and the better part of another elapse before Grace becomes aware that something is terribly wrong with Giles. She leaves the cabin to search for him, but it is too late. Grace finds him lying inside the make-shift shelter:

Upon the straw within, Winterborne lay in his clothes, . . . his hat was off, and his hair matted and wild. Both his clothes and the straw were saturated with rain. His arms were flung over his head; his face was flushed to an unnatural crimson. His eyes had a burning brightness, and though they met her own, she perceived that he did not recognize her.⁴¹

Grace is forced to realize that she has probably caused his death. She rejects him before her marriage to Fitzpiers, keeps him at a distance afterwards, and finally, by accepting his offer of shelter, drives him into the storm. We cannot help but note here that Hardy refuses to allow these would-be lovers to solemnize their union. When Grace has her scene of recognition, she is forced to accept and admire the worthy rustic whom she has so recently rejected; it is too late. There is a "blinding moment of illumination"⁴² when Grace understands what she has lost:

⁴¹ Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 349.

⁴² Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 166.

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? . . . 'O my Giles,' she cried, 'What have I done to you!'⁴³

Her outcry of supplication is unheard because the fruit god whose treatment of Grace has been one of "undeserved reverence"⁴⁴ soon dies. Hardy punishes Grace for passing up the worthy striving rustic for the sexual despot whom she marries. The novel ends on a note of defeat:

. . . one of the saddest things about The Woodlanders is that the community, unlike those in earlier novels, seems to have no capacity for resistance. Its attitude towards those who exploit it is one of passive criticism or, worse still, of passive acceptance; the people cannot even imagine an active defiant revolt like the Casterbridge skimmity-ride. The only exception is Timothy Tangs's man-trap, which is almost a joke. Natural law fails to assert itself. Fitzpiers gets off scot-free [compared to others in Hardy who have disturbed the peace], while the pure in heart suffer and die.⁴⁵

Hardy lambasts the society which would allow such suffering on the part of the pure in heart. He mourns the untimely death of this noble rustic. To do so, he enlists the aid of nature, heretofore seen as a source of strength and

⁴³ Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 347.

⁴⁴ Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 166.

⁴⁵ Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 167.

vitality in the stable rustic community. But when the last of his hard-driven rustics goes down in defeat, Hardy's view of nature takes on a post-Darwinian guise.⁴⁶ The flowering or fruit-bearing orchards are contrasted with dead and dying trees; during the storm which kills Giles Winterborne the woods assume a quality of terror:

Dead boughs were scattered about like ichthyosauri in a museum. . . . Next were more trees close together, wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows. . . . Beneath them were the rotting stumps of those of the group that had been vanquished long ago, rising from their mossy setting like black teeth from green gums.⁴⁷

Nowhere in Hardy is nature so unsympathetically presented. It is significant that in this last novel about basic rusticity the author paints this disturbing portrait of what has been a pure source of strength in the earlier novels. Hardy pours on more gloom:

The whole world seemed to be a house of death, pervaded by the loss to its uttermost length and breadth. Winterborne was gone, and the corpses seemed to show the want of him; those young trees, so many of which he had planted, and of which he had spoken so truly when he said that he should fall before they fell, were at

⁴⁶ Williams, Thomas Hardy and Rural England, p. 164.

⁴⁷ Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 339.

that very moment sending forth their roots in the direction that he had given them with his subtle hand.⁴⁸

Marty South, Giles Winterborne's female rustic counterpart in the novel, the woman who loves but is unloved, has the last word:

Now, my own, own, love, she whispered, you are mine, and on'y mine; for she [Grace] has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died. But I--whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down, I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring, I'll say none could do it as you. If ever I forget your name, let me forget home and Heaven. But no, no, my love, I can never forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things.⁴⁹

Giles's death is the figurative demise of the stable and honest countrymen to whom Hardy dedicates the Wessex novels. Winterborne's death is mourned by a rustic, an earth-dweller. He is not mourned by Grace Melbury, the sophisticated rustic maiden for whom he dies. He is not mourned by Melbury, the timber merchant, who refuses to allow his daughter to marry the earth-dweller. And Giles is not mourned by Fitzpiers, the visitant who is in large part responsible for the troubles of the entire rustic community.

48 Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 360.

49 Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders, p. 364.

The end of the novel is markedly different from the endings of earlier novels. We see here a turning point in the author's fiction because for the first time, the rustic male goes down to final defeat, in the case of Giles, in death. But Hardy holds true to the idea of the rustic peacemaker. Giles keeps the peace; and though he dies and is unfulfilled in love, he leaves his permanent mark in the woodlands; the humble orchardist and planter of trees leaves not only a legacy of keeping the pastoral peace but also a symbol of life in the trees that he has nurtured. Although The Woodlanders marks the end of one style of writing in Hardy, the basic theme which we have been arguing here remains intact. The peacemaker in Hardy is the harmonizer in the rustic community. And if Giles does not "win" in the novel, then neither does the peacebreaker. The true "winners" are the spirits of rusticity, symbolized in Hardy's rustic children.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS: THE EVERLASTING CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

An examination of the rustics in Hardy indicates that their roles in the novels as well as their characterizations are more complex than has been previously recognized. The tendency to examine them only as a group has led to an oversimplified interpretation of the functions of these peasants. On the function of the rustics it is generally agreed that they act as a chorus and that they provide humor. But there are more complex uses, and Hardy's rustics are worth more attention than they have received.

Thomas Hardy chronicled the graveyard descent of a civilization which was dying, and he idealized a way of life that was departing. Hardy belonged to a stratum of society which always lived close to poverty and want, suffering and loss, a section of society that had no time for the luxury of lamentation or the pleasure of nostalgia. But he does in fiction what he and his folk could not do in actuality. He affords himself the pleasures of a trip, via his fiction, to the Wessex of yesteryear. In the novels Hardy embarks upon a nostalgic journey on which he pays

tribute to the folk who peopled his past. In so doing, he bestows upon them the honor of immortality.

Hardy created in his novels a picture of life deeply infused with the ways and work of an agricultural economy. Hardy's objection to Victorian rural society was that it denied and inhibited human potential and reduced people to mere wage-slaves whose work was deprived of meaning and joy. There can be no doubt that Hardy loved his land deeply and passionately and that it is his own kith and kin whom he most loves to describe. He knew and respected these Dorset denizens. His knowledge of them and their lore deepened a mood or temperament that was already melancholy. This awareness profoundly affected his philosophy of life, and it fed his imagination with rich and varied material. Moreover, it gave us his most precious quality--a brooding pity for all living things.

Hardy's rustics distinguish themselves in three ways. They have a primitive capacity for nature worship. They possess a comely dignity and a strong respect for one another. And they exhibit a certain fixity of character which allows them to live their lives in the daily presence of continuity. Simplicity, resoluteness, power--these commonalities set the rustic apart from Hardy's other characters, the so-called major ones. It is through his folk

that Hardy indicts the society which thwarts man's efforts to be. Hardy's people are his best hope for the world. They represent the old order, not a backward or unproductive one, but one in which men are judged by their characters, not by the number of acres of which they can boast. Thomas Hardy was no reactionary weeping for lost youth and the demise of simplicity. He did not reject the prospect of advancement for rural Dorset. On the contrary, we find him sympathizing with rural changes late in the century, approving of economic betterment, even while regretting the loss of old traditions and admiring the work of Joseph Arch to raise wages.

Throughout the Wessex series, Hardy draws portraits of men and women who are engaged in constant occupation with the earth and with living things. He concerns himself with people who live in communion with nature. These people are shepherds and rural workers for whom nature supplies a permanent source of strength. Hardy invokes the healing hand of nature throughout the novels: this invocation can be seen in the gay dance under the greenwood tree; the majestic scenes of flock-tending in Far from the Madding Crowd, or Shepherd Oak in the same book watching the stars and reckoning time from the top of Norcomb Hill as certain other shepherds watched by night in the scriptural story;

Tess's sympathy with nature shown in the way in which she tends her group of chickens at Talbothays; the old mayor's great knowledge of haytrussing and wheat-tending; Giles Winterborne's near worship of the beautiful trees that he has nurtured by his own hand; Jude when he, as a young boy, after reading a scene of perfect sublimity in Carmen Saeculare, is moved to kneel and pray, or the same character who weeps at the imminent fall of a great tree, and who takes the time to tend a stricken rabbit who lies hurt in his path. These and a plethora of other scenes in the novels illustrate Hardy's respect for nature as shown through the rustic. Wessex folk dramatize Hardy's strong premise that when man's spiritual happiness brings him close to the land, he can then defend himself from the doings of the heralds of discord, the urban invaders. The novels lead us to feel that the urban world is cut off from this natural world and that it [the urban world] exists as a rootless and isolated form of life, unsatisfying and without sustenance from the natural world. Even the parson in Under the Greenwood Tree, a newcomer to Mellstock, is looked upon somewhat critically and coldly as though he were in another social plane. It is from townspeople and wanderers that the mischief comes, from Sergeant Troys and Wildeves and Fitzpierses. Hardy suggests here that life is

at its best when the rustic is at his own hearth, consorting with his own kind.

The rustic's innate dignity and respect for his fellow man allow Hardy to hold him up as a model of virtue and goodness. His is a good nature and a spirit of community. Perhaps this community spirit can best be shown in the rustics' treatment of the dim-wit, ever present in the community. The Mellstock community's treatment of its simpleton is a case in point. Joseph Leaf contends that he "never had no head,"¹ and the rustics assent to Leaf's self-assessment, but with no sense of humiliating Leaf. As he is a rustic son and a member of the community, it takes him under its wing and looks out for him. He belongs. Other dim-wits in the novels are treated with similar tolerance: Joseph Poorgrass in Far from the Madding Crowd and John Creedle in The Woodlanders. In their respective societies, Leaf, Poorgrass, and Creedle are given duties which they can perform; and so they contribute to the general welfare of the community. Thus, by virtue of its humaneness, the rustic community spirit manages to turn a social liability into a social asset. The goodness and truth of the community are kept intact, as it protects its own. It was a

¹ Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London: Macmillan, 1872), p. 124.

truth celebrated by Coleridge in his apostrophe to the magic circle of neighborhood, "a circle defined by human affections."²

The rustic's fixity of character is the basis of the continuity which characterizes his daily life. When men live amid the daily presence of continuity, "the unchanging hills, the unvarying rhythm of the seasons, the ancient memorials of the churchyard, the fireside talk of old men and women who mumble their memories like living calendars of births, marriages, and deaths,"³ then spiritual solace must be theirs. It is to the harmony between themselves and their surroundings that the country folk owe the singular impressiveness of their virtue and their vice; they are not engulfed in the vast crowds, distracted by the whirl of life. They retain a personality, clear and strong, which years and experience do not confirm. These men are the Oaks, Venns, and Winterbornes--kindly, wise, dignified, distinct. They are men in their right minds and places. These are the men whom Hardy salutes. These, too, are the men whom he mourns after they have been dealt the death-blow by society. They are the Jude Fawleys.

² R. J. White, Thomas Hardy and History (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1931), p. 49.

³ White, p. 57.

The stable world in which the rustic resides is the same world which Hardy wistfully hoped to see realized in Victorian society. This is the society which restricted Jude Fawley in Jude the Obscure, which is the story of the lad of parts whom fate is against to the end. Jude's yearnings to be an intellectual man are unanswered. The ancient university of Christminster lies just beyond the border of Hardy's Wessex. When Jude hears of its glories, he climbs a ladder and gets his distant vision of its towers and spires. Surely this is Matthew Arnold's scholar gypsy come to life again. There is some sense of protest in this story of the peasant boy who comes to Christminster, is rejected, and dies there miserably. The novel was to show the contrast between the ideal life a man wished to lead and the squalid life he was fated to lead. Jude's story is a modern parable; his generation does not work on the land. Jude's desire is to be a modern man. Like Oak, Venn, and Winterborne, Jude shows in his tragic life what the ordinary, warm-hearted people could have achieved if they had not been frustrated.

Jude the Obscure is Hardy's last and most critically disclaimed novel. It is comparable in greatness to Middlemarch, Great Expectations, and Wuthering Heights. The novel rejects the earlier sunnier concept of nature

described in Under the Greenwood Tree. Christminster and Marygreen, the great university city and the obscure village in the countryside, are the two real emotional poles in the novel. Jude's work in the city of light is whole and creative. But Christminster exploits his labor. This city is, in a twisted way, the interloper in the novel. It represents the diabolical agent so prominent in the earlier novels, seen here not as a human but as "the microcosm of a false society."⁴ This society 'kills' Jude just as surely as it does his children. Significantly, Jude never surrenders his mind to the system. He struggles, and he does battle with his fate. He refuses to submit to the conventional dogmas, never admits defeat, and refuses to fall. When he does fall, it is in death, because in life he had not fallen; he had been pushed.

Hardy did not wholly indict the towns and cities of Queen Victoria's England. Nor did he dishonor the universities. He felt that the city, like the university, could become a force for good even if it was not one at present. So, too, could the countryside, if it were organized for the sake of the men and women who live and work there. Hardy's greatness lies in the fact that he

⁴ Merryn Williams, A Preface to Hardy (New York: Longman, 1975), p. 187.

transforms into literature a whole area of central human experience; he continues the pastoral tradition begun by the bard Theocritus. Hardy does so by pursuing the laboring man, the rustic, beyond the fields and farms of his labor. He knows the laborer not by sight alone but by heart. If Hardy were not on the side of the angels, he would not champion the cause of simple humanity. If he were indeed the pessimist, the master of tragic irony, whom he is accused of being, he would not repeatedly paint scenes of pastoral beauty such as those in Far from the Madding Crowd and The Woodlanders. If Hardy had not been a tolerant man, he would not have given us nobility clothed in rustic garb--Oak, Venn, and Winterborne. If Hardy had not been a peace-loving man, he would not have repeatedly punished the disturbers of the pastoral peace; neither would he have rewarded the simple devout rustic for maintaining this most holy peace. Noble in life, noble in death--these are Hardy's people, his human epitaph, the everlasting children of the world.

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