

THOMAS HARDY'S MOORS

JOHN MOORE

SOMEWHERE near the beginning of the second decade of the present century, it began to be realized in modern criticism that the method of saying it was nothing compared to the significance of the thing said. That marked a minor revolution in the history of the modern novel. And it is not without importance that this discovery marks the elevation of Thomas Hardy from the comparative obscurity into which criticism had relegated him to the bouncing popularity that true criticism can give to a writer. For criticism saw him no longer as a teller of uncouth tales, country tragedies; he became one of the greatest of English novelists. Now it is part of Hardy's greatness that he submits fiction to the control of a metaphysic, and by so doing he has raised it to an equality with drama and other great arts. We do not have to accept his fatalistic outlook to appreciate his mastery over the mystery of existence. Whether we believe with him or no in the impotence of the human will, the resistance of his characters to a force which they do not even dimly perceive results in tragedy of the highest order. In *Farfrae*, *Sue Bridehead*, *Eustacia Vye*, *Tess*, *Bathsheba*, *Clym* and *Angel Clare* we have a group of distinct human beings, who make a world-wide appeal because they sound the depths of passion and their experiences have universal application. The interested reader will know old *William Dewey* and the *Tranter* and *Mr. Penny* and *Thomas Leaf*, with an intimacy probably not very often enjoyed outside printed pages. By an extraordinary metaphysic and aesthetic, Hardy has lifted his Wessex world to a lofty pedestal that makes it possible to describe him, not inaptly, as "the novelist of the universe."

My purpose, however, in this writing is to draw attention to a certain phase of Hardy's metaphysic, that aspect of it that has to do with his interpretation of earth, the particular use to which he puts his moors. I am thinking of that beautiful and solemn pageant of Nature that makes Hardy's novels so memorable. The great novelist was born at the edge of a heath; and it seems as if whilst he lay in the cradle it had whispered to him through all his senses every secret that a heath could hold, so that in his skilled and penetrating maturity he became the Wizard of Wessex—"Within that circle none durst walk but he." One

cannot forget Yalbury Wood, Blackmore Vale, Egdon Heath. Suppose, therefore, I take two examples of what I specifically mean. Let us begin with one from his early work. "The Three Strangers" opens thus:—

Among the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries may be reckoned the high, grassy, and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of counties in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd.

Fifty years ago, such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may be possibly standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not more than five miles from a county-town. Yet that affected it little. Five miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleet, snows, rains, mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less, in fair weather, to please that less repellent ribe, the poets, philosophers, artists, and others who "conceive and meditate pleasing things".

In this passage Hardy has not acquired that unerring mastery that later he uses to conceal his purpose. But "the wind up there blew unmistakeably when it did blow, and the rain hit hard whenever it fell;" albeit the dwellers on the lower levels were sure to mistake the measure of severity in the various weathers on that upland. But when we pass to Egdon Heath, we see Hardy's wizardry working at its zenith of vision and zest. The passage is in *The Return of the Native*, and I may give the reader the pleasure of looking it up rather than quote it to him at length here. There Egdon Heath stands so inescapably imagined by the brilliant author, presiding over the story, "a vast, careless oppression," as Lascalles Abercrombie calls it. There it stands with its sights and sounds, barren, imperturbable, with the play of light and shadow about it. Here it greets the dawn—"the whole enormous landscape bore that impress of reserve, taciturnity, and hesitation which is usual before the day." Again, "the good things of day begin to droop and drowse," night falls, humanity sleeps, but not Egdon Heath. Again, in a memorable scene a bonfire lights up the sky—"tufts of fire glowing scarlet-red from the shade. . . tinctured the silent clouds above them, lit up their ephemeral caves, which seemed to become scalding cauldrons." The whole heath is metamorphosed!

Hardy shows us this impressive landscape from the point of view of the chief characters. The old "reddleman" lives in

one of the heath's hollows. He lives in his travelling van close to bird and beast and insect, watching the tragedies and comedies that go on around him. Up on its wilder stretches the schoolmaster-to-be goes out to the delightful labor of cutting its furze, though in that act he feels the pitilessness of the heath. It presents itself to him as "that imperturbable countenance which, having defied the cataclysmal onsets of the centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man." Hardy's moors dwarf the human unit to an almost infinitesimal point. Men seem to walk them experiencing the drifting power of material fate, conscious atoms amid invisible tides that swirl and sweep with unconscious but conquering motion. Yet from another point of view these same moors reveal to us the ascending quality of man's desires, his grip of a reality that also apprehends him, his invincible ardor for high things. One thinks of Michael Henchard, magnificent in his rude, elemental strength, most moving in his discomfiture and defeat, and Eustacia mistaking the indifference of the material world's motion for malignity, a solitary figure on Egdon's Heath's summit, one in its impotence of the fatality of things descending at last "with the glide of a water-drop down a bud." It is the distant rims of the world that are man's horizon, however pigmy he appears in the immensities of space and time. For even in Hardy the earth comes to consciousness in man; the novelist's metaphysic is that of ascent.

Hardy's moors are co-weavers with Time in the web of human destiny. Amid the flux of Time aged Egdon Heath persists, as do the lesser downs, and whatever powers or presences haunt the earth, Hardy's moors suggest that human existence is not a bleak landscape of disillusion in its entirety. Hardy has no corrosive cynicism, shows no deliberate defacing of human life. And even his irony (epitomised in Eustacia motionless at the top of the heath, then coming down like the glide of a drop of water on a bud) is softened by pity. Quickening sympathy is joined to sweeping vision. We see the essence of Hardy's irony in the picture he paints of Eustacia at the summit of Egdon Heath: Eustacia so small against the vast, somehow sentient and seeing heath.

I said Hardy "paints" the picture of Eustacia on the heath. That is hardly a correct statement. For in his descriptions Hardy seldom "paints" a scene. He reveals things in motion—grasses moving in the wind in a way to suggest different natures in the blades; a fathomless shade where sounds and

scents drew human kind instinctively to stand and listen to the litany of the leaves of trees on the right hand and on the left. He exhibits things moving, breathing, appearing. In his passages descriptive of his moors there is as much to be heard as seen; and he usually lets the reader see the effect upon the listener. He personifies the delicate and the relentless forces of Nature. The woods listen to the song of birds, the moon moans for the day in the depth of night, the trees seem to clap their hands in glee, the earth aspires to the sun shining in its strength and beauty.

I think we touch the acme of Hardy's art in his description of Egdon Heath. He says, "The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening glow in pure sympathy. . . The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen." Thus do Hardy's moors watch and wait upon our human scene; thus do they scan our trivial and triumphant moments in this mysterious and shadowed world.

It is the method of this great novelist to take his characters at critical and crucial moments in their careers out into the open, on the moors, and there in touch with the great elemental forces of Nature to give battle to instinct, desire, ambition, or what not, the multitudinous complexities that move and mate within the boundaries of consciousness. Invariably there in touch with Nature the great determining things happen to the novelist's characters. Whatever he sacrifices of their stature seems to be balanced by the forces that play upon them, and by the sense of the primeval drama of man in his environment.

THE AUDUBON CENTENARY

"A. L. O. W."

IT is now over a century since the great American artist-naturalist, Audubon, went over to England with the hope of publishing reproductions in aquatint of his Birds of America painted from life, each bird alive in its true habitat. For Audubon refused to paint a stuffed specimen. He visited London, Edinburgh and various cities in the Old Country, showing his birds in one-man exhibitions, as they say, and securing subscribers for reproductions in sets on Elephant Folio, which, being interpreted, refers to size of the paper, twenty-eight by twenty-three inches or double that size. By 1827 he began to publish in London an edition of less than two hundred sets, at the handsome price of £182. 14s. a set (\$1,000); and by 1838 he completed the whole work of 435 plates on double Elephant Folio. We are told that a single set in good condition to-day would probably be worth \$15,000.

I once heard of a set or part of a set in Winnipeg; but since I did not know the owner, a sight of it never came my way. Happily this present year, marking the centenary of Audubon's high adventure in publishing, is celebrated by Messrs. Macmillan in a magnificent single volume containing the plates in color as they appeared originally, and also 65 additional plates from paintings done later, of birds in the Rocky Mountains and the West. And a splendid enterprise it is in publishing by the American and Canadian branches of that old and honorable house. The introduction and informing descriptive text, or legend, as the term is, below each picture are by William Vogt, editor of *Bird Lore*, official organ of the National Association of Audubon Societies. In an appendix are notes on the original plates and on all the legends below them. The title-page of one of the original portfolios is reprinted, in which the author and publisher is a "Fellow of the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh, and of the Linnaean and Zoological Societies of London, Member of the Natural History Society of Paris, of the Lyceum of New York, etc., etc." These titles interest us this day as showing how the artist and naturalist was regarded by such learned fraternities abroad. The very first picture in the new volume, a wild turkey, may at first

startle you; also others here and there; but Mr. Vogt reminds us that Audubon, taking the painted bird "out of its glass case for all time", was vigorously opposed to the drab methods of contemporary bird-painters.

He dramatized his birds by means of color, and this it was that brought response from both scientists and connoisseurs. Every bird in the five hundred shown here is a living bird, though the plumage may be sometimes exaggerated. Open the volume at the wild turkey and, if you have time, you will turn the page, and turn the page to the 500th plate. In the course of a concentrated survey, you will learn the truth of Mr. Vogt's words that Audubon was a century ahead of ornithologists in his empirical knowledge of bird behaviour. It is said that the manifold writings on that branch of natural history can be traced to his influence. Another important point is made by Mr. Vogt—Audubon's name is now almost synonymous with conservation.

Eleven years after his visit to Labrador, the last known specimen of the Great Auk was taken; and twenty-six years after his death, the Labrador Duck was no more. While wild life in America has been reduced by advancing settlement, the greatest loss has been owing to killing for profit and sport. Happily in our day, increasing numbers find life more worth living because it includes birds. The words are Mr. Vogt's, and they are true.

The handsome portrait, a vignette by F. Cruickshank, shows patrician features and a romantic face, especially in the wide-open, glowing eyes. Has Audubon been too much romanticized and almost canonized "as though inspired by a high idea only"? "Actually, like many a biology professor and game warden since, he was thoroughly—and selfishly—enjoying life in the woods, fields and marshes." Well, any idealist who thoroughly enjoys research in Nature's wildernesses need not be selfish in that enjoyment. And posterity, which reaps all the benefits flowing from such original study, need not be too curious! But we are debtors to Mr. Vogt for his assistance to our understanding of the artist and his great services in bird-lore. You will see in these colored plates many birds, species and subspecies in their native haunts, of which you never before heard.

Numerous biographies and studies of Audubon have been published, including one by his widow, and an edition of his journals by his granddaughter. And in recent years the most

notable study is *Singing in the Wilderness: A Salute to John James Audubon*, by Donald Culross Peattie, an American naturalist. But a sober, solid informing biography is Robert Buchanan's *Life and Adventures of Audubon the Naturalist*, with an introduction by John Burroughs, who would be fourteen years old when Audubon died in 1851. It is based upon the naturalist's diaries and a prolix but ill-written manuscript, needing not only redaction but reduction, and practically re-writing. I have never heard of a better, more reliable biography of the man as he lived, showing the work he did as a painter of living birds of every American species in their natural wild-wood. The judgment of Burroughs was that "the service he had rendered to ornithology surpassed, perhaps, the work of any other one man who ever lived." As long ago as 1869, when Burroughs was writing, Audubon had come fully into his own, and Buchanan's biography, reprinted by benefactor Dent, is now available for the straitened purse.

Audubon's ancestry was Spanish and French, as the name indicates. His father, an adventurer of the seas, rose from the humblest place in a fishing vessel to be captain and owner of a small fleet with which he sailed to the West Indies. There he made a fortune, and bought a small estate which bears part in the story. He became a commodore in the French navy, purchased a beautiful estate nine miles from Nantes, and died at the great age of ninety-five. During residence on San Domingo, he had purchased land in Louisiana, Virginia, Philadelphia, and had married in Louisiana a beautiful wealthy lady of Spanish birth who bore him three sons and a daughter. She suffered death on her husband's estate, San Domingo, at the hands of negroes during a revolt.

The elder Audubon married, in France, a second wife with whom he left the son, so famous later. As wealth in the New World increased, he acquired a valuable farm, Millgrove, in Pennsylvania. Dying, he bequeathed the French estate to the great Audubon who gave it to his sister.

These few points have a bearing on his career, but there is more yet. The stepmother was devoted to him, and humored every whim. His father was of sterner stuff, and decided on a course of study leading to the French navy or to engineering; but happily the course prescribed suited the lad, for it included mathematics, geography, drawing, music and fencing. In music he learned to play a violin, a flute, and a guitar; to the famous French artist, David, he owed his early lessons in draw-

ing birds and animals in the category of natural history. He made many excursions into the country, bringing back birds' nests and eggs, mosses, stones and other specimens. Returning from a voyage, his father was surprised and pleased at the large collection, and then asked about the progress in study. No satisfaction was given, relations became strained, and a severe course in mathematics was ordered. For over a year it was actually close study, but still some recreation and collecting specimens in the country. At Nantes he made two hundred sketches of birds and other objects in Nature.

So it was that in despair of a soldier or sailor, young Audubon was sent out to Mill Grove, "a blessed spot" he recalled, where "hunting, fishing and drawing occupied my every moment." There he met and fell in love with Lucy Bakewell, daughter of a neighbor. She taught him English and he gave her drawing lessons, with marriage and his father's consent as sequel. Lucy was a faithful, devoted and helpful wife and mother, loved and honored by her husband.

The years between that wedding and the publishing sojourn in Great Britain were filled with episodes, events and wanderings of the naturalist looking for, watching and painting birds. Audubon's own true country was among the birds of America.

Before we pass to his relations with Dr. McCulloch, Dalhousie University's first president, let me add a word or two from Audubon's letters and diaries, from which this biography is largely drawn, and I keep as closely as possible to his own descriptive text. In Edinburgh, at a meeting of the Royal Society, he was seated opposite Sir Walter Scott, the president, "where I had a perfect view of this great man and studied nature from nature's noblest work. Sir Walter came and shook hands with me, asked how the cold weather of Edinburgh agreed with me, and so attracted many members as if I had been a distinguished stranger." He visited an exhibition, and looked long at a painting of a stag, three dogs and a hunter by Landseer: "But the stag has his tongue out and his mouth shut! The principal dog, a greyhound, has the deer by one ear, while one of his fore-paws is around his leg as if in the act of fondling with him. The hunter has laced the deer by one horn very prettily and, in the attitude of a ballet-dancer, is about to throw another noose over the head of the animal. To me such a picture is quite a farce."

In deep snow on a Sunday, he was "toted" to church in a sedan chair. "I had never been in one before, and I like to try everything in this strange world. But so long as I have two feet and legs, I never desire to try one of these machines again; the short swinging motion reminded me of sensations felt during the earthquake in Kentucky. But I was well repaid by hearing a sermon from the Rev. Sydney Smith. It was a sermon to me. He made me smile, and he made me think more deeply than I had ever before in my life. He interested me by painting my foibles, and then he pained me by portraying my sins, until he made my cheeks crimson with shame, and filled my heart with penitential sorrow." A few evenings later, he met the Canon and his daughters at a large party. And before leaving Edinburgh "with a high heart" in March, 1827, Audubon recorded on a black-edged sheet of the diary that, after frequent urging, he had sacrificed the long curls falling to his shoulders, "and the will of God usurped by the wishes of man, my heart sank low." It was for the loss of his luxuriant ringlets only.

Returning to London, he foregathered with the great portrait-painter, Sir Thomas Lawrence, who sold some pictures for him, and went to Paris where he found that his birds were known to some. The visit was fruitful in the way of meeting the savants and receiving ample recognition, but two months in France won only thirteen subscribers to the *Birds of America*. Once again in London, he painted feverishly during the short daylight. Among the new pictures were two for the Duke of Orleans. Reviews of his work—that was his word—appeared in England and a notable one in *Blackwood's Magazine* by John Wilson (*Christopher North*). Home again with his wife: they both wept in sheer joy. For three months he painted birds and animals with wonted eagerness, and then they both set sail for England. During this visit, he began work on that American *Ornithological Biography* which grew to five stout volumes, and was published in Edinburgh. There were two later sojourns in the Old Country, both in connection with his publishing business, but there were numerous journeys in search of birds before and between those visits: in Florida on the St. John's river and among the live-oaks, to Maine and New Brunswick, but notably to Labrador, Newfoundland, and Nova Scotia. Wherever he travelled, the naturalist was not idle. Self-trained, eager, experimentally learned in bird-lore and

animal lore, quick in observation, by the excursions he added to his knowledge.

He was the first to attach a label to a bird's leg and send it flying. He was a watcher, too, of his own kind, and once wrote that men as well as birds had been under observation. But he was by nature one of the most kindly in feeling for his fellows. I suppose that all naturalists are both shrewd and kindly observers of human nature.

In August, 1833, we find Audubon, after some months in Labrador, at the Royal Hotel in Pictou enjoying supper and treading a carpet! "In the evening we called on Professor McCulloch who received us kindly, gave us a glass of wine, and showed us his collection of well-preserved birds and other things, and invited us to breakfast to-morrow at eight o'clock, when we are further to inspect his curiosities. The professor's mansion is a quarter of a mile from the town, and looks much like a small English villa." The diary of next day records the "excellent Scotch breakfast" with the McCulloch family. "The more I talked with the professor, the more I was pleased with him. I showed a few of my Labrador drawings, after which we marched in a body to the university, and again examined his fine collection. I found there half a dozen specimens of birds which I longed for and said so, and he offered them to me with so much apparent good will that I took them and thanked him. He then asked me to look around and see if there were any other objects I would like to have. He asked me what I thought of his collection, and I gave him my answer in writing, adding F.R.S. to my name, and telling him that I wished it might prove useful to him." Audubon was surprised that the Governor to whom Dr. McCulloch offered the collection for £500 had not purchased it, for he considered it worth twice as much.

Audubon and his party took the coach for Truro, which they reached near sunset, the situation and view a delight enhanced by the joy of knowing that "I was but a few days from the dearest being to me on earth." Dr. McCulloch had also come on to Truro, and he took the eminent traveller to call upon S. G. Archibald, Esq., Speaker of the Assembly, to whom some drawings were shown. *Carpe diem* would have been the motto for Audubon. The Doctor introduced him to various members of the Assembly in Truro. The next visit was to Halifax, where he learns that natives of the Province are called "Blue Noses", thence to Windsor, where he saw but did not visit King's College and missed Haliburton, who was in Boston.

Audubon's journal and frank letters are a real revelation of the man. The reader may well be assured that whatever record may leap to light, his memory never will be shamed. We notice that Pictou Academy was a university, and its principal a professor, as recorded by Audubon. He sent his new friend a number of paintings now in the museum of the university, presented by Dr. McCulloch's granddaughter: one, a figure of a speckled bird caught in the snare of the fowler and being eaten by carrion crows, (see *Jeremiah XII.9, Proverbs VII.23*); another of bobolinks, described to me as exquisite when hanging in Miss McCulloch's sitting room. The correspondence which ensued is part of her valuable donation to Dalhousie, which she had the pleasure of giving instead of bequeathing. She had already given some letters to an Audubon Memorial in Kentucky. She gave also direct to Dalhousie, instead of bequeathing them, the twenty-three volumes of the *Birds of America* as they originally appeared in paper covers.

The friendship between the younger, comparative amateur and the older professional naturalist, based on compatible tastes, was a mutual distinction and a happy memory ever after to the educator who became Dalhousie's first President. Through the kindness of her present President, I am able to quote a letter from Audubon dated, New York, September 12th, 1836;

"My Dear Young Friend,

Should you not have heard of my return to the United States prior to this, this will confirm the fact to you. I have been here with John (his son) one week.

Along with this, I send you a copy of my third volume of *Ornithological Biographies*, hoping that it may give you some pleasure. I am extremely desirous to procure *in the flesh*, (feathers and all, as soon as possible when shot) certain species of birds more abundant and more easily procured in your section of America than south of it, and now beg of you to fulfil for me the following commission.

That is to say, to procure for me all the species annexed on the other side, or as many as you can procure, in common rum or whatever other spirits sufficiently strong to save them from putrefaction, in pairs as much as possible, and if not, by twos of each species: to have these put in a good cask, with a list of the specimens contained therein, and to ship this to New York on the 1st of May next, to Nicholas Berthoud, Merchant, who is my brother-in-law, and on whom I now authorise you to draw at sight for the amount laid out by you for the specimens, spirit, etc.

If you will attend to this, you will render to science and myself a very great obligation, and I shall feel great pleasure

at my hands. I hope your dear father and family are well. Your friends in London were so when we left. Please present my sincerest regards and thanks to your father and family, accept the good wishes of mine and believe me, ever sincerely,
Your friend and servant,

JOHN J. AUDUBON.

Please to acknowledge receipt of this, care of N. Berthoud, New York. It goes by duplicate.

P.S. You may lay out to the amount of One hundred and fifty dollars, in Bird, Spirits and Casks.

J. J. A."

That letter is evidence of Audubon's capacity for business when it concerns his birds. I cannot help wishing that some Dalhousian Bluenose will write a concise chronological, thoroughly dated biography of John James Audubon.