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PARODY IN THE POEMS OF

THOMAS HARDY

Recent critical interest in the poetry of Thomas Hardy has done much to establish the modernity of both his poetic vision and his technique. Practising poets, in particular, have acknowledged the influence on modern poetry of Hardy's colloquial rhythms, his stark images, and his characteristic flatness of tone. However, while the poet-critics—from Pound and Auden to Thomas and Larkin—have rescued much of Hardy's poetry from the charge of awkwardness they have done little to dispel the notion of Hardy as the gloomy village bard, the melancholy anatomist of life in the sere. In isolating Hardy's integrity as his greatest contribution to modern poetry, these defenders have, I believe, overlooked an equally pervasive and modern note in Hardy's poetry.

There is a case to be made for Hardy as parodist, as satiric interrogator of the philosophical catchwords and poetic clichés of much Victorian poetry. Many of his notes on poetic subjects reveal an impatience with the literary stereotypes of his contemporaries and the desire to challenge them. "Poets write of 'a motion toiling through the gloom': you examine: it is not there".¹ Again, perhaps with Browning and Tennyson in mind, he writes, "Courage has been idealized; why not Fear?"² In his "Apology" to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* Hardy similarly shows his contempt for the comforting clichés that, he believed, had become the stock-in-trade of much Victorian poetry. The poet, as late as 1922, is not expected to "explore reality", but to "gratify certain known habits of association",³ to repeat in verse "what everybody says and nobody thinks" (*EL*, p. 211).

Hardy's mission as a poet was to break the tyranny of poetic formulas and "habits of association", to challenge "the inert crystallized opinion—hard as rock—which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting"

(*LY*, p. 57). Like Crabbe, whose influence he acknowledged, Hardy would strip his subject of its conventional or "poetic" associations in order to uncover the reality that contradicts the poetic stereotype. That his satiric and parodic intention was frequently misconstrued is apparent from his complaints against those critics who read his verses as serious when they were intended to be of a "satirical, dry, caustic, or farcical cast" (*LY*, pp. 79-80). In view of Hardy's reiterated protests against the insincerity and "false romance" of much nineteenth-century poetry it becomes justifiable to examine the extent to which Hardy's satiric poems can be read as a deliberate rebuttal of the verse that most consistently reflects "what everybody says" and wishes to hear.

Among Hardy's contemporaries perhaps the most popular purveyor of optimistic slogan and sentimental stereotypes was Martin Farquhar Tupper.⁴ The poet's mission, Tupper holds, is "to gladden man", and he sets the example by tirelessly extolling the virtues of Victorian institutions and assuring his readers that in England "Nothing's false or hollow . . . /But solid as a rock".⁵ His motto is unashamedly "All's for the Best!" So accurately did Tupper's optimistic verse proclaim what the majority of readers wished to hear that Queen Victoria seriously considered appointing him Poet Laureate.

Hardy registers his contempt for such a "stout upstander" as Tupper in the phrases with which he parodies the type in "In Tenebris II" (*CP*, p. 154). The lolling rhythms underscore the facile clichés of the professional optimists; as always in Hardy's poetry, they are shouting "All's Well!"

. . . the clouds' swoln bosoms echo back the shouts of the many and strong
That things are all as they best may be, save a few to be right ere long. . . .

This is an apparently contented group:

Their dawns bring lusty joys, it seems; their evening all that is sweet;
Our times are blessed times, they cry; Life shapes it as is most meet,
And nothing is much the matter; there are many smiles to a tear. . . .

Hardy catches the sentimental cheapness in the inflated tinsel of "the clouds' swoln bosoms", and in the many trite phrases at the album-verse level: "lusty joys", "all that is sweet", "blessed times", "many smiles to a tear". No specific detail is allowed to give these generalities a substance. The emptiness of the rally and the busyness of its promoters is reflected in the rhythms of "Breezily go they, breezily come", and again, as so often in Hardy's poetry, dust and noise characterize the "careers" of the happy band.

Although Tupper was perhaps the most popular Victorian poet of sentimentality and an unqualified faith in the rightness of things, many of his

attitudes can be found also in the *Annuals* that flourished between 1830 and 1860 and that continued to find a large readership until after 1890. At the height of the gift-book craze more than 100,000 copies were sold in a single year.⁶ Wordsworth, Coleridge, the Brownings and Tennyson were represented in the better *Annuals*, but the staple of the gift-books was the pretty or sentimental poetic "flower" written by an ardent but frequently ungifted novice trembling with sensibility.

The gift-books as a whole are not difficult to characterize. The "Leaflets of Memory", the "Thought Blossoms" and "Dewdrops"—all offer cheer and comfort for every human grief and all are free from the slightest taint of impropriety. All feature the same spectrum of sentimental stereotypes: the warmth of domestic affections, the deepening of married love, the inevitable wages of sin, the plight of the repentant ruined maid, the return of the prodigal child, the fidelity of the pet dog, the virtues of the country life, and the blessings of poverty. The diction and imagery are as formulaic as the sentiments. The images of the major romantic poets are ubiquitous, but they become little more than stock sentimental landscape furniture or their symbolic significance is automatic and invariably comforting. It is understandable that the *Annuals* should become favorite gifts at birthdays and weddings.

To the sentimental mentality and the sweet aesthetic that characterized the gift-books Hardy was unreservedly opposed. Leslie Stephen had described that mentality when he lectured Hardy on the two commandments to be observed by all Victorian writers who wished to prosper: "Thou shalt not shock a young lady", and "Remember the country parson's daughter".⁷ Hardy largely ignored the advice; none of his books, he assured Virginia Woolf, were "fitted to be wedding presents".⁸

One large group of poems in which Hardy violates the sentimental formulas of the gift-books deals with what might loosely be described as the "domestic affections". These poems require little explication, for their method is almost predictably that of satiric inversion of the sentimental stereotype. A more interesting group treats the romantic landscape and the stock images and attitudes associated with it. Limiting the discussion to these two broad categories it would be possible to construct from Hardy's satiric poems a burlesque of the typical nineteenth-century *Annual*.

Hardy's poems on young love and the sentiments of the hearth, for example, are hardly calculated to bring tears to the eyes of young lady readers. The jilted girl of "Cross-Currents" does not respond conventionally to the cliché that "Love will contrive a course" (*CP*, p. 638). Nor do Hardy's newly-

weds experience the wedding-night bliss celebrated by the albums. Hardy's bride would like to be "home again with dear daddie!" ("The Homecoming", *CP*, p. 234), for her husband is not the gracious lover of romance. The husband is aware of all the romantic props with which sentimental poetry falsifies life, and correctly diagnoses the cause of his wife's distress. He will sing her a pretty song "of lovely flowers and bees,/And happy lovers taking walks within a grove o' trees".

When Hardy's lovers do get happily over the cottage threshold, they fail to experience the life-long escalation of affection to which a host of minor poets testified. Hardy's satiric reply can be found in such a poem as "The Curate's Kindness" (*CP*, p. 194). The husband has dreamt of escape into the workhouse, where the husbands will be segregated from their wives. The news that he will be able to share a room with his wife after all does not elicit the expected response, for the husband has sought to get free of his "forty years' chain". In the satiric poems on married love Hardy's men and women seldom give the sentimental response to the death of a partner. Hardy's "manor-lady" dances "in the gloaming" when she learns that "her roving spouse" has died ("Seen by The Waits", *CP*, p. 370). The wife of "The Pink Frock" (*CP*, p. 443) "hardly can bear" the news of her husband's imminent death, for she will not be able to wear her pretty pink frock, and will be expected to "shut [herself] up" in sham mourning. She feels cruelly cheated.

As many of Hardy's "memory" poems make abundantly clear, the dead cannot count on the continuing affections of friends and relatives. Nor can the mother always realize the demonstrations of grief that the children of sentimental literature invariably make at the death of a parent. Some children glory in "doing what they will" now that "Mother won't know" ("Unrealized", *CP*, p. 278). William Bowles establishes a popular stereotype, in a poem much anthologized, of the faithful daughter who dedicates her life to bereavement over a dead father:

Young hope may blend each colour gay,
And fairer views appear;
But no! I would not go away—
MY FATHER'S GRAVE is here.⁹

Hardy's "orphaned" old maid has been victimized by the sentimental appeals of her father: "I wanted to marry, but father said, 'No—/Tis weakness in women to give themselves so'." She spends her youth as nurse-maid and

housekeeper to her father only to learn that she has been cheated out of the very comforts that her father has received.

In the sentimental poetry of the age those young ladies who do not marry romantically, or do not waste away in a moated grange, or do not shed tears of filial affection until they die are likely to suffer moral ruination as punishment for their departure from the stereotypes. Those who desert hearth and home can expect to die unmourned in a distant land. At best they return home, wan and pale prodigals, seeking forgiveness of a dying mother. The typical Annual contains at least one, and often two, "ruined maid" poems. Always the maid is the object of pity and commiseration.

In "A Daughter Returns" (*WW*, p. 152) Hardy sets the stage for the "prodigal-returned" motif, but the daughter is no pathetic victim of sin, penitently weeping for forgiveness. She wears a "dainty-cut raiment" and "earrings of pearl", and she has a new brightness in her eyes. Like Hardy's Amelia (*CP*, p. 145), whose ruination has brought her "fair garments", "gay bracelets", "bright feathers", a "delicate cheek", and a good deal of social polish, this prodigal daughter challenges the image of blissful rural innocence popularized by the Annuals and by such a poem as Tennyson's "Queen of the May", which was published just two years before Hardy wrote "The Ruined Maid".

Even when loss of virtue brings with it the responsibilities of motherhood and the inevitable social stigma, Hardy's maids are endowed with marvellous recuperative powers, and they have read enough sentimental poetry to be able to use its stock phrases in highly original contexts. One of his maids meditates on the fruit of her sin:

Yet now I've beside me a fine lissom lad,
 And my slip's nigh forgot, and my days are not sad:
 My own dearest joy is he, comrade and friend,
 He it is who safe-guards me, on him I depend;
 No sorrow brings he,
 And thankful I be
 That his daddy once tied up my garter for me!

("The Dark-Eyed Gentleman", *CP*, p. 227)

Of the several stock album verse expressions in this single stanza, three ("My own dearest joy is he", "No sorrow brings he", "on him I depend") belong to the widow's sentimental meditation on the innocence of her child; Hardy applies them to the illegitimate offspring of a youthful romance. Two further clichés ("He it is who safe-guards me", "comrade and friend") are ironically in-

congruous in a maternal meditation, for they belong to the motif of the dog as symbol of fidelity.

The fidelity of dogs is taken for granted in sentimental poetry. The "playmate of the boy" never fails to grow up "the faithful friend of after years". Usually the dog's fidelity is contrasted with the faithlessness of human companions, and frequently it survives the death of its master. In his best-known poem on the theme ("Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave", *CP*, p. 310) Hardy's speaker responds from her grave to the sound of digging overhead. Her first assumptions conform to comforting sentimental possibilities. Is it her "loved one?—planting rue?" Or her "nearest dearest kin?" The answers from above quench each expectation: her husband has re-married and her relatives have tired of tending her grave. Hope rises when the digger identifies himself as the "little dog" of his "mistress dear". She is wrong a final time, for the dog has come to bury a bone and apologizes for disturbing the resting place of his mistress.

Hardy's ironic treatment of sentimental or romantic domestic stereotypes is perhaps a very minor aspect of his mission to "take a full look at the Worst". Yet for several reasons this quarrel is an important and consistent extension of his satiric interrogation at other and more philosophical levels. Sentimental poetry encourages unthinking acceptance of comforting clichés at the same time that it fosters hypocritical responses to life. It can also condition the reader to see life through the images of a pretty romantic landscape in which "nothing is much the matter", in which the sun always shines and the pretty objects of nature are conveniently at hand to lend comfort and hope. The romantic landscape, is not, of course, the exclusive property of sentimental album verse. Nevertheless, it is in the world of the gift-books that the pretty landscape becomes formulaic.

Hardy treats the romantic landscape satirically because he sees it as a comforting fiction designed to nourish man's illusion of an early paradise. It is the basic metaphor for what can loosely be called the "romantic" way of looking at Nature and at life. While a host of minor poets continued to apostrophize nature's adornments, Hardy was groping for an anti-romantic aesthetic of ugliness that would answer to the emotional realities of the post-Darwinian world.

Hardy's resistance to an aesthetic of prettiness and to the clichés of feeling that accompany it was both deliberate and systematic. Some hints of his deliberateness can be found in his comment that "poetic texture" is more to be admired than "poetic veneer" (*LY*, p. 80), in his confession to Gosse

that he wished to avoid the effeminate beauty associated with "the jewelled line",¹⁰ and in his belief that "the beauty of association is entirely superior to the beauty of aspect, and a relative's old battered tankard to the finest Greek vase" (*EL*, p. 158). Behind these seemingly random comments, however, stands a more fully articulated theory of the nature of beauty and of the poet's responsibility to it. More than twenty years before the publication of his first volume of poems Hardy recorded his intention of avoiding both the content and the poetic trappings of what he called "false romance". Since science had amply demonstrated nature's defects, these defects "must be looked in the face and transcribed" (*EL*, p. 150). Consequently, the immediate business of the poet, Hardy believed, was to rid poetry of its romantic stereotypes by finding "beauty in ugliness" (*EL*, p. 279).

An aesthetic dedicated to a transcription of nature's defects and of the beauty latent in ugliness would be fatal to romantic poetic attitudes, but poetry itself would survive, Hardy concluded: "There is enough poetry in what is left [in life] after all the false romance has been abstracted, to make a sweet pattern" (*EL*, pp. 150-151). In formulating his aesthetic Hardy is careful to distinguish between two kinds of romanticism. Since the romantic impulse "will exist in human nature as long as human nature itself exists", the duty of every poet is to "adopt that form of romanticism which is the mood of the age" (*EL*, p. 198).

Hardy's "rambler" (*CP*, p. 252) is the modern man, mocked by the imagery of orthodox beauty and incapable of responding conventionally to its reputed charms. He has in his youth followed the advice of the sentimentalists who claim that

each songster, tree, and mead —
All eloquent of love divine —
Reserves their constant careful heed. . . .

Such "keen appraisalment" is no longer possible for the speaker. In confessing his failure to overcome a sense of isolation he negates the entire catalogue of stock images that ornaments the affirmations of the sentimentalists. His indifference to nature's hieroglyphs does not arise from sheer perverseness. He has in his youth read nature sentimentally only to learn too late that he has mis-intrepreted her "aspects, meanings, [and] shapes". As in so many of Hardy's poems, the speaker admits that for some observers the transcendental experience is possible, that only he is somehow spiritually maimed. That this concession is frequently ironic is evident from such a poem as "Middle-Aged

Enthusiasms" (*CP*, p. 55), where the desperate attempts by the speakers to luxuriate in the romantic landscape are systematically cancelled by their frank admission that such indulgence is either no longer possible, or that the attempt itself is a hypocritical gesture.

The vision of a romantic landscape is, of course, available to those who deny the evidence of the senses, or who choose an auspiciously romantic moment of mist or semi-darkness:

At four this day of June I rise:
 The dawn-light strengthens steadily;
 Earth is a cerule mystery,
 As if not far from Paradise
 At four o'clock
 Or else in the great Nebula,
 Or where the Pleiads blink and smile.
 ("Four in the Morning", *CP*, p. 678)

The poem appears to build towards a climax of emotional indulgence or towards a mystic moment of affirmation. The same conditions that make possible Wordsworth's celebration of London from Westminster bridge promise here to stimulate a eulogy on the rural landscape. At the height of the apostrophe, however, the speaker parenthetically betrays the grounds of his optimistic anticipation:

(For though we see with eyes of guile
 The grisly grin of things by day,
 At four o'clock
 They show their best.)

The human figure that enters upon the scene is not the shepherd of pastoral literature. He is a "labourer at compulsion's whip", and the "wheezed whetings" of his scythe shatter the romantic potential of the moment.

Hardy's country maids, like his rustic labourers, contradict the sentimental stereotype. They either recognize the pastoral landscape as an element of "false romance" or they remain oblivious to the charms conferred upon nature by the poets. Conditioned by a century of sentimental nature poetry, Hardy's country maid ("From Her in the Country", *CP*, p. 217) strains to experience instinctively what such poetry has told her she must *feel* about the relative beauties of country and town. After putting down the dream of a life in the city "by force of will" she mechanically recites the catechism of the sentimentalists:

I said: How beautiful are these flowers, this wood,
 One little bird is far more sweet to me
 Than all man's urban shows; and then I stood
 Urging new zest for bird, and bush, and tree;
 And strove to feel my nature brought it forth
 Of instinct, or no rural maid was I.

The effort is vain, for she can not see "worth/Enough around to charm a midge or fly", and so resumes her dream of "city din and sin". Hardy inverts stage-by-stage the reverie of countless rural maids in magazine and album-book poetry of the century. The poem illustrates as well as any of Hardy's "landscape" poems, G. M. Young's statement that Hardy is "the poet of the death of custom that once came unconsciously, but that was by 1898, deliberate and uneasy".¹¹

Not all romantic landscapes are rural. The travel *Annals* of the century can be equally enthusiastic about such celebrated tourist shrines as Genoa and the Mediterranean. Almost invariably the experience of the conditioned observer surpasses even his most romantic expectations. In keeping with the classic grandeur of his subject, Hardy attempts an apostrophe to Genoa and the Mediterranean:

O EPIC-FAMED, god-haunted Central Sea,
 Heave careless of the deep wrong done to thee
 When from Torino's track I saw thy face first flash on me.
 And multimarbled Genoa the Proud,
 Gleam all unconscious how, wide-lipped, up-browed,
 I first beheld thee clad—not as the beauty but the Dowd.

(*"Genoa and the Mediterranean"*, *CP*, p. 91)

The heightened tone, compromised by the image of the observer "wide-lipped, up-browed" in disappointment rather than sublime astonishment, oscillates wildly in the third stanza as the speaker attempts to reconcile the literary and romantic with the factual and prosaic—the Beauty with the Dowd. The details of the Queen's "squalid undress" jar incongruously with the inflated diction and hymnic syntax, so that the effect is one of devastating anti-climax:

Out from the deep-delved way my vision lit
 On housebacks pink, green, ochreous—where a slit
 Shoreward 'twixt row and row revealed the classic blue through it.
 And thereacross waved fishwives' high-hung smocks,
 Chrome kerchiefs, scarlet hose, darned underfrocks;
 Often since when my dreams of thee, O Queen, that frippery mocks.

This tourist would likely share Hardy's own impressions of a Sunday sermon at Trinity Church, Dorchester: "The rector in his sermon delivers himself of mean images in a sublime voice, and the effect is that of a glowing landscape in which clothes are hung out to dry".¹²

On the romantic landscape several images, particularly, become cues to sentimental indulgence or they serve as automatic signals of comfort and hope. The emblem that is most often invoked, apostrophized and questioned by poets from Wordsworth to Tennyson is the flower. It thrives especially in the *Forge-Me-Nots*, the *Keepsakes*, and the *Floral Bouquets* of the century. Sometimes it serves as the object of unfocussed sentimental effusion, as when Eliza Cook testifies that she can never view buttercups and daisies "But something warm and fresh will start/About the region of her heart". Sometimes, as in James Hurdis' "The Lily of the Valley", the flower symbolizes the specific virtues of Christian humility and Victorian modesty. Most often, however, the flower is addressed as a sentient being, capable of offering moral instruction or of communicating transcendent truths.

Hartley Coleridge might dismiss the pantheistic habit by insisting that in Wordsworth's poetry Nature "teaches what she never knew,/The beautiful is good, the good is true". Hardy employs a subtler method. He subjects the flower to relentless interrogation:

Sunned in the South, and here to-day;
 If all organic things
 Be sentient, Flowers, as some men say,
 What are your ponderings?
 How can you stay, nor vanish quite
 From this bleak spot of thorn,
 And birch, and fir, and frozen white
 Expanse of the forlorn?

("To Flowers From Italy in Winter", *CP*, p. 117)

The interrogative apostrophe, the popular stanza form, the redundancy of the speaker's questions, the prosaic catalogue of northern vegetation, the wordy repetitiousness of detail, and the inflexible meter—all suggest satiric parody. In the final stanzas the elaborate and sentimental personification, and the "meta-physical" resolution elevate the poem to the level of mock heroic:

Frail luckless exiles hither brought!
 Your dust will not regain
 Old sunny haunts of classic thought
 When you shall waste and wane;

But mix with alien earth, be lit
 With frigid Boreal flame,
 And not a sign remain in it
 To tell man whence you came.

The sentimental elaboration that Hardy denies his human subjects at the moment of death—Drummer Hodge would be a fair example—he here lavishes on a dying flower.

Though the parodic element is perhaps less obvious in "The Year's Awakening" (*CP*, p. 315) the sentimental tendency to invest vegetable life with consciousness or symbolic significance is treated ironically here as well. Again there is the apostrophe and the reiterated questioning, first of the "vespering bird" and then of the "crocus root". Again the suspiciously elaborate questions and the flecks of sentimental diction hint at ironic intent. The question itself ("How do you know?") is ironic, for the bird and crocus root have no response to make. They, like the seasons, operate by "merest rote".

Hardy's fondness for burlesque through satiric inflation of the sentimental attitude can best be seen in his mock apostrophe to the chrysanthemum:

Why should this flower delay so long
 To show its tremulous plumes?
 Now is the time of plaintive robin-song,
 When flowers are in their tombs,
 ("The Last Chrysanthemum", *CP*, p. 136)

Two elements of the sentimental formula are present in the first stanza: the interrogative opening that implies a sentient audience and anticipates a silent but pregnant symbolism, and the sentimental imagery that confuses the flower first with the bird ("tremulous plumes") and then with man ("tombs"). The second and third stanzas do not take the speaker in the direction of a conclusion; instead they embellish the sentimental pathos of the flower's dilemma through elaborate personification. The sun has "called to each frond and whorl/That all he could for flowers was being done", but the chrysanthemum has taken no heed of that "fervid call", waking but in autumn "when leaves like corpses fall". In the fourth and fifth stanzas the speaker allows himself a final sentimental indulgence, and moves to the inevitable question:

Too late its beauty, lonely thing,
 The season's shine is spent,
 Nothing remains for it but shivering
 In tempests turbulent.

Had it a reason for delay,
 Dreaming in witlessness
 That for a bloom so delicately gay
 Winter would stay its stress?

The speaker must admit finally that his questions are rhetorical, for he is stopped short by the realization that he has talked "as if the thing were born/ With sense to work its mind", when in fact the flower is but "one mask of many worn/By the Great Face behind". There is a further satiric point in the reiterated questions; the flower has failed to "uncurl" because, unlike the crocus root, it has missed its cue from nature. The superior "wisdom" that the sentimentalist projects into the flower fails Hardy's chrysanthemum, so that its lesson, if it could speak, would not be comforting. It is possible that "The Last Chrysanthemum" is a parody of W. T. Moore's "The Last Rose of Summer". At any rate, the poem resembles in theme and treatment the many "mock pathetic" songs that Elna Sherman describes as among the ninety-two popular songs in the Hardy music-book.¹³

The objects of nature are silent or give only ironic answers because in a naturalistic universe they have no divine lessons to teach. It is fitting, therefore, to portray them as "chastened children sitting silent in a school", their faces dulled, constrained and worn ("Nature's Questions", *CP*, p. 58). The relevant questions are the same for both human and non-human: "We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!" Like man, Nature has grown tired of asking.

Hardy's birds too have ceased to function formulaically as symbols of hope or even as decorative landscape imagery. For one thing, the birds that perch on Hardy's gnarled and skeletoned trees are highly unattractive by the aesthetic standard of "orthodox beauty". They are likely to be "sodden and unkempt" pigeons or rooks who resemble "gaunt vultures" ("An Unkindly Man", *WW*, p. 17), or they are lowly starlings and swallows. The bird of sentimental poetry knows nothing of hunger or sickness; Hardy's birds are generally emaciated, and rheumatic. Instead of cheering man with a song of hope, they almost invariably remind him of harsh realities. The speaker in "The Reminder" (*CP*, p. 252) looks out on Christmas day upon a frosty scene, but he does not see the cheerful robin that decorates the gift-book Christmas landscape:

There to reach a rotting berry,
 Toils a thrush,—constrained to very

Dregs of food by sharp distress,
Taking such with thankfulness.

Why, O starving bird, when I
One day's joy would justify,
And put misery out of view,
Do you make me notice you?

The poem is a complete inversion of the romantic motif of the bird as messenger of comfort and hope.

The bird of romantic poetry may have access to realms of truth inaccessible to man. The truth apprehended by the bird is hope-inspiring and is contrasted with the despair of unilluminated human vision. Hardy's darkling thrush (*CP*, p. 137), "aged . . . frail, gaunt, and small", flings his soul upon the growing gloom of a wintry landscape, but the speaker can not make the easy and automatic association:

So little cause for carolings
Of such ecstatic sound
Was written on terrestrial things
Afar or nigh around.
That I could think there trembled through
His happy good-night air
Some blessed hope, whereof he knew
And I was unaware.

Typically Hardy qualifies his symbol of hope with a subjunctive. His thrush is itself too obviously the victim of time and process to have access to "blessed Hope". Far from being privy to sources of joy and comfort unavailable to man, Hardy's birds are likely to look to man for answers to the riddle "How happy days are made to be" ("The Caged Thrush Freed And Home Again", *CP*, p. 134).

Because man and nature are fellow victims of the "Great Face behind", Hardy at times demonstrates genuine pity for the objects of nature. He has no patience whatever with that other romantic symbol, the moon. When it is associated with a tale of romantic love, Hardy employs it as a sinister portent of "wedlock's aftergrinds", as in "Honeymoon Time At An Inn" (*CP*, p. 484). It takes sadistic satisfaction from the knowledge that the romance it has fostered will "grow numbed" by the "cark of care". The moon of the sentimental stereotype may link separated lovers by serving as a symbolic "medium", or as a romantic object of mutual communion. Hardy's moon ("The Moon Looks

In", *CP*, p. 367) knows that such communion is rare; the lover's sentimental meditation is a self-deception, for the thoughts of his mistress are otherwise employed.

Hardy's moon is not the sympathetic confidante of lovers. Nor is she a chaste Cynthia to be adored for her constancy. She is an unwelcome and solicitous mistress, a "Wan Woman of the waste" who practises her wiles from "Behind a hedge, or a bare/Bough of a tree" ("At Moonrise and Onwards", *CP*, p. 536), all the while affecting a blatantly false modesty:

How well I know
Your furtive feminine shapel
As if reluctantly you show
You nude of cloud, and but by favour throw
Aside its drape.

Knowledge alone is not always sufficient defense against the wiles of this enchantress. She must be relentlessly exorcised. Donne chides the sun because it intrudes on his love-making and evaporates the romantic aura; Hardy castigates the moon because it is a symbolic reminder of a time when illusion was not yet cancelled by the light of reality. There is an urgency about Hardy's anti-romantic injunctions:

Close up the casement, draw the blind,
Shut out that stealing moon,
She wears too much the guise she wore
Before our lutes were strewn
With years-deep dust, and names we read
On a white stone were hewn.

("Shut Out That Moon", *CP*, p. 201)

Systematically Hardy revokes the invocations to romantic indulgence. Each stanza is a paradigm for Hardy's conviction that "Experience unteaches" (*EL*, p. 231).

In the sentimental poets the moon and stars do more than provide an atmosphere conducive to romantic attitudes. They are equally functional as symbols of hope and aspiration to be invoked when optimistic faith temporarily wavers. In Hardy's poetry they inspire no hopeful meditations and they utter no comforting platitudes. Nature herself is aware that man can no longer read her sun as a "Sanct-shape", her moon as the "Night-Queen", or her stars "as August and sublime ones/That influences rain" ("The Mother Mourns", *CP*, p. 102). When Hardy does attempt an interview with the moon, he re-

ceives only ironic replies. His moon offers no solution to "sore things, shudderful", or to the tragedy of "Growth, decay,/Nations alive, dead, mad, aswoon"; it can only suggest that life is a show "God ought surely to shut up soon" ("To the Moon", *CP*, p. 411).

Hardy's communion with the stars is no more comforting. At the moment of human tragedy the stars are generally indifferent: "White stars ghost forth, that care not for men's wives,/Or any other lives" ("The Harbour Bridge", *CP*, p. 742). Since the star is no longer an agent of "divine influences", Hardy's star reverses the sentimental pattern of interrogation by turning to man for comfort and guidance ("Waiting Both", *CP*, p. 605).

Hardy can also burlesque the sentimental song of hope whose consolation resides primarily in reiterated affirmation and imagistic cliché:

O sweet To-morrow!
 After today
 There will away
 This sense of sorrow.
 Then let us borrow
 Hope, for a gleaming
 Soon will be streaming,
 Dimmed by no gray—
 No gray!

("Song of Hope", *CP*, p. 120)

The apparent affirmation of the opening lines is qualified by the automatic rhyme ("gleaming"/"streaming"), and by the speaker's awareness that nothing in the situation itself provides sufficient grounds for optimism. "Minute-beats" will bring this speaker "nearer to dawn",

When there will sing us
 Larks, of a glory
 Waiting our story
 Further anon—
 Anon!

In spite of the reiterated resolves, the exclamations, and the catalogue of stock hope imagery, the speaker betrays his uneasiness. The hopeful attitude is a disguise, for he must "Don the red shoon" of the actor. Rather than abandon his dream, he seeks comfort in a final imagistic cliché:

The night cloud is hueing,
 To-morrow shines soon—
 Shines soon!

Hardy's diction has been criticized for sinking at times to the level of "fugitive magazine verse"¹⁴ or of approaching a "sort of album verse diction that ranges between the inept and the perfunctory".¹⁵ The album verse diction is present, but in such poems as "The Dark-Eyed Gentleman", in the satiric "landscape" and "flower" poems, and in the poems of youthful romance and deluded hope, Hardy either misapplies that diction for ironic effect or he employs it for parody and burlesque.

Of the various methods by which Hardy challenges the sentimentality, the spurious optimism, and the dominantly pretty aesthetic of "false romance", perhaps none is more fundamental and pervasive in his poetry than the unromantic wasteland through which he projects both his stark aesthetic and his anti-romantic attitude. Like Egdon Heath, the landscape of the poems is stripped of bowers, meads, moon-blanchéd swards, ecstatic nightingales, and seas of daffodils. The traditional shrines of romantic literature too have vanished. The romantic pilgrim may be attracted to such shrines as Lyonesse and Lakeland, but his journey is an anachronism: "new eras" blot "sought-for signs" at Lyonesse, while the bard of Lakeland "charms no more" ("Meditations On A Holiday", *CP*, p. 580).

What remains is a wasteland from which not only romantic shrines, but the immanent divine spirit of the romantics has been banished. Where most poets choose a spring day and a budding grove to illustrate Nature's holy plan, Hardy is likely to choose a fallow field in winter. Frequently a dead tree or a skeletoned hedge completes the tableau. Darkness, an oppressive clamminess, and an atmosphere of sinister anticipation are typical features:

A clamminess hangs over all like a clout,
The fields are a water-colour washed out,
The sky at its rim leaves a chink of light,
Like the lid of a pot that will not close tight.

("Suspense", *WW*, p. 124)

Even when the season is spring, that most poetically inspiring of seasons, Hardy resists the poetic cliché. He gives the reader no "merry month of May", ornamented as if by formula with sweet zephyrs, budding daisies, and twittering robins. His May is "An Unkindly May":

And sour spring wind is blurting boisterous-wise,
And bears on it dirty clouds across the skies;
Plantation timbers creak like rusty cranes,
And pigeons and rooks, dishevelled by late rains,
Are like gaunt vultures, sodden and unkempt.

(*WW*, p. 17)

Not one item in the traditional catalogue is allowed to decorate this spring landscape, nor is there any hint of nature's effortless rebirth. The laborious lines, metrically irregular and heavily clogged with harsh consonants, underscore the sense of great effort. Hardy may elsewhere project imaginatively what life will be like "If it's ever spring again" (*CP*, p. 563), but the spring celebrated by most English poets seldom arrives in his poetry.

Hardy's wasteland imagery, like Arnold's, can represent "wastes of thought", the sterile and dusty ritual that lies buried in a graveyard of creeds, overgrown by "fennish fungi, fruiting nought" ("The Graveyard of Dead Creeds", *CP*, p. 689). More typically, however, it suggests the spiritual dryness and total enervation of will that Hardy sees as the characteristic condition of the modern age, or it serves as the elegiac symbol for the entire nineteenth century, its early romantic optimism replaced by fatigue.

From the Hardy wasteland there is no escape. There is in Hardy's poetry no successful quest for a Holy Grail, or triumphant journey to a romantic dark tower. Hardy's pilgrimages almost invariably begin in romantic expectation and end at the tomb of illusion. Escape by sea is impossible, for the wasteland (except in those poems dealing with Hardy's Cornish romance) is entirely land-locked. Where some poets can leave the mortal world behind by escaping to a sublime promontory or an Alpine height to commune with the stars, Hardy has only Wessex Heights, a poor thing by comparison. Although "mind-chains do not clank" and "ghosts . . . keep their distance" (*CP*, p. 300) on Wessex Heights, the retreat is both temporary and temporal. The poem does not celebrate transcendence; instead, it catalogues the details of the speaker's alienation from comrades in the "lowlands".

Hardy's recurring complaint against "the failure of things to be what they are meant to be" (*EL*, p. 163) is primarily an indictment against an imperfect universe in which the "real" seldom corresponds with the "ideal". The complaint can be applied with equal appropriateness to the disparity between a poetically embellished image of life and the unvarnished experience itself. Hardy can acknowledge the appeal of the romantic view; if he has "seen one thing/It is the passing preciousness of dreams" ("A Young Man's Exhortation", *CP*, p. 569). The adjective is crucial, for in a world that cries for a "full look at the Worst" man must learn to recognize the dream as dream. With Clough's *Dipsychus*, Hardy asks only this: ". . . play no tricks upon thy soul, O man;/Let fact be fact, and life the thing it can".

NOTES

1. *Thomas Hardy's Notebooks*, ed. Evelyn Hardy (London, 1955), p. 30.

2. Florence Emily Hardy, *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy* (N. Y., 1930), p. 17. All subsequent references to this volume and to *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy* (N. Y., 1928) by the same author will be acknowledged parenthetically. The abbreviations *EL* and *LY* will be used throughout.
3. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (N. Y., 1925), p. 526. All subsequent quotations from this volume will be acknowledged parenthetically. The abbreviation *CP* will be used throughout. Quotations from *Winter Words* (London, 1928) will also be documented parenthetically and will be abbreviated *WW*.
4. For details of Tupper's popularity see Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago, 1957) and Amy Cruse, *The Victorians and Their Reading* (N. Y., 1936). Meredith might refer contemptuously to Tupper's moralizings as "a cold hash of Solomon", but thousands of readers believed that "here was the great Victorian poet for whom the nation had waited". (Cruse, p. 179)
5. *Tupper's Poetical Works* (Philadelphia, 1852), p. 80.
6. Charles T. Tallent-Bateman, "The 'Forget-Me-Not,'" *Papers of the Manchester Literary Club* (Manchester, 1902), p. 82.
7. Evelyn Hardy, *Thomas Hardy, A Critical Biography* (N. Y., 1954), p. 142. That Hardy's poetry seriously offended the sensibility of at least one young lady is suggested by Hardy's sonnet, "To a Lady Offended by a Book of the Writer's" (*CP*, p. 57).
8. Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London, 1954), p. 92.
9. "My Father's Grave", *The Poetical Works of William L. Bowles* (Edinburgh, 1885), Vol. II, p. 258.
10. Quoted in J. I. M. Stewart, *Eight Modern Writers* (Oxford, 1964), p. 49.
11. *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy* (London, 1960), p. xxxiii.
12. *Thomas Hardy's Notebooks*, p. 36.
13. "Thomas Hardy: Lyricist and Symphonist", *Music and Literature*, XXI (1940), 153.
14. G. M. Young, *Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, p. xi.
15. C. Day Lewis, "The Lyrical Poetry of Thomas Hardy", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXXVIII (1951), 143.