THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE CONJURING SHOW
THE VISUAL EXPERIENCE IN THOMAS HARDY'S UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE, FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD, THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE, AND THE WOODLANDERS

by

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ABSTRACT

An informing motif in Hardy's better-known earlier fiction is the visual experience. The most critical moments in the lives of the major characters, and the turning points of the novels, are visual experiences, or, in Hardy's words, "unadjusted impressions." Vision becomes a working metaphor for wisdom and insight; seeing, observing, and making associations between seen experiences move each character to the level of understanding Hardy designed.

The novels Under the Greenwood Tree, Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and The Woodlanders portray the nature of the visual experience from several disparate points of view. It is in these novels as well that the forming of Hardy's technique is most evident. Characters as different from one another as Dick Dewy, Francis Troy, Eustacia Vye and Giles Winterborne share similar flaws. All have the deficiency of a distorted view of reality and of their experiences. All experience the problem that, despite the limitations and distortions of reality caused by individual personality, those distorted impressions are the only tools available through which to gain insight and wisdom. Most fail.

Hardy develops his technique by building upon the idea that experience is a visual miscellany. Under the Greenwood Tree establishes the fact, in an admittedly comic mode. Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native include the complexities of different character types, and an increasing emphasis on the involvement of an indifferent universe. The Woodlanders incorporates these facets of experience, and adds the complication of the involvement of the social order.

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List of Abbreviations

References to Hardy's fiction are from the New Wessex (paperback) edition under the general editorship of P. N. Furbank (London: Macmillan, 1974-75). The following works are cited in this study, preceeded by the abbreviation used, and followed by the date of original publication in book form:

UGT	Under the Greenwood Tree	(1872)
FMC	Far From the Madding Crowd	(1874)
RN	The Return of the Native	(1878)
MC	The Mayor of Casterbridge	(1886)
W	The Woodlanders	(1887)
T	Tess of the d'Urbervilles	(1891)

Other works by Hardy are cited from the following editions:

CP — The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976)

Early Life — Florence Emily Hardy, Vol. I of The Life of Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1933)

Later Years — Florence Emily Hardy, Vol. II of The Life of Thomas Hardy (London: Macmillan, 1933)

Both volumes of The Life were, of course, written by Hardy despite the appearance of his second wife's name as author.

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Introduction

That Thomas Hardy was naturally visually oriented, and an intensely visual writer, has been well documented by his readers. His poetry, fiction, and biography reveal this sense everywhere. And he himself implies that visual "impressions" point to meaning, both in art and in life: "I have no philosophy," he writes in 1920, "only what I have often explained to be only a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show" (Later Years, p. 219). His analogy is telling: a bewildered child at a conjuring show sees visual images one upon the other; there is no obvious relation between events, and no causal relationship. The images, or impressions, present themselves in isolation; their meanings or causes are beneath the surface or invisible. Experience, therefore, is something not easily categorized, nor is it easily understood. He further maintains, insofar as his own thinking and experience was concerned, that life is ordered by "a thousand unconscious causes" rather than one conscious cause (Later Years, p. 220). Yet he also endeavors, personally as well as artistically, to find meaning through experience: "unadjusted impressions have their value," he writes in his Preface to Poems of the Past and the Present, "and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change." (CP, p. 84). These thoughts, that experience is a "confused heap of impressions" yet that one must

endeavor to decipher the phenomena of life's experiences, comprise an informing idea in Hardy's art and thought. Despite the limitations, indeed, distortions, of one's own personality, those distorted and confused impressions are the only tools available to decipher experience. Ultimately they are the only hope of achieving wisdom.

Hardy's novels are full of people experiencing the confused heap of impressions, searching for meaning in them, yet whose personal limitations come in the way. Experience is difficult to decipher and to make sense of for the most thoughtful of his characters, impossible to decipher for the vast majority. The narrator brings these "confused impressions" to the light, and encourages the reader to develop a discerning eye to events to see that, in "unadjusted impressions" there is to be found the expression of a "thousand unconscious causes" of life. This tension between the character's limited personal view and the wisdom of the narrator's (and thus the reader's) larger point of view becomes a controlled irony in the novels. It is the aim of this analysis to show how this tension is expressed in the novels, how Hardy brings together the problems of insight into the meaning of things, and how the sight of the experiences point to the meaning. I will show how his intensely visual nature as a person is reflected in his art, and how in his novels the acts of seeing, observing and being seen reflect the levels of understanding achieved through visual experiences. Further, I shall also show how the metaphorical function of vision (or lack thereof) becomes a pervasive theme: the "confused heap of [visual] impressions" is difficult, if not impossible, to form into a working philosophy of life.

As I have stated, Hardy's visual techniques, and the power of his

"hawk's vision"[1] have been examined by many critics. Indeed, some critics have taken Hardy's visual techniques and related them to all forms of "sister arts," even to those which Hardy never experienced, such as television.[2] A view of Hardy's portrayal of vision and visual techniques as they relate to the characters' miscellany of experience, however, has been less well documented. Penelope Vigar touches upon "the contrast between appearance and reality, what life is _like_ and what life _is_" in her full-length study of Thomas Hardy.[3] Indeed, Professor Vigar notes Hardy's use of visual technique in "framing" his scenes, seeing the novels as "narrative pictures":

> Many of his most striking scenes--Tess in the fields, for example, or Eustacia on the heath--have a peculiarly static quality; all action is suspended while the subject is being examined and expounded on. Life and movement crystallize into one 'felt moment' . . . it is the _impression_ of the book which remains, a vision of moments which remain distinctly in the mind, a string of outstanding incidents.[4]

Norman Page finds this "peculiarly static quality" of much of Hardy's writing as well, and details Hardy's "use of sharply visualized situations verbally rendered, not merely as a means of evoking character or scene, but as a method of telling a story."[5] Dr. Page presents this idea by describing Hardy's affinity with Victorian narrative painting, and outlines the visual technique as a narrative technique. While this approach is noteworthy and useful, it does not entirely explain the deeper significance of the technique with respect to the development of the characters in the novels. J. Hillis Miller, while commenting on Hardy's use of perspective and point of view, seems to come closer to the metaphor of vision in the portrayal of the characters while yet recognizing Hardy's visual techniques in the portrayal itself:

> The character ultimately glimpses a covert design in his life which has been invisible while he has been living that life. The artist brings that design into the full light of day. The critic is the third in a series. He is a watcher watching the watcher watch his characters.[6]

Indeed, the reader, the narrator and the character all see the experience in a slightly different way. And what is as important as the action is who is seeing that action, and how--with what infirmities or blinders.[7] Yet it is the rare player in a Thomas Hardy novel who actually "glimpses a covert design in his life." Most often the design remains unrecognized.

Ian Gregor has also attempted to define the experience and existence that Hardy portrays.[8] While not ostensibly concerned with vision or with a reader-centred approach to the fiction, Gregor provides an interesting concept derived from Hardy's notion of the human race as "one great network or tissue which quivers in every part when one point is shaken, like a spider's web if touched" (Early Life, p. 232). Gregor considers this "great web" to be "a provisional design flung across the vacancy of miscellaneous experience."[9] While Gregor uses his notion to supply a form and overall structure to Hardy's major fiction, I would like to examine, not the "provisional design" which Gregor presents, but the miscellaneous experience itself.

Indeed, for most of Hardy's characters, experience is miscellaneous and confusing. They never do arrive at the recognition of the provisional design, but remain lost and disheartened by their "confused heap of impressions." At times this blindness is willful, at times inherent in the nature of the character. To understand the characters is to examine the characters' experience, what they see, what they do not, and

to examine how they view it.

Hardy's statement that his philosophy is a "confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show" provides a visual image, a visual rather than an intellectual impression. A close examination of the novels reveals this sense of the "conjuring show" in the life of every character: the repeated recording upon the mind of a scene or static picture, the whole meaning of which is not evident to the watcher (character), either at the moment of experience, or for some, until it is explained (if ever) by the recording of further events. Oftentimes the watcher, like the bewildered child, never sees the entire picture, understands the meaning, or arrives at a "true philosophy of life." Hardy's fiction embodies the idea of the bewildered child and presents experience in a conjuring show of impressions. The most critical experiences are truly visual, static, and often confusing on the surface. So it is that Grace Melbury's knowledge of Fitzpiers' infidelity comes not only in the whispered words of Felice Charmond in the woods, but also much earlier, in the experience of seeing the figure of Suke Damson retreating from her future husband's house in her nightdress. Mrs. Yeobright, on the other hand, dies with the very fragmented knowledge gained by seeing Eustacia's face in the window and Clym's furze-hook by the door. That Mrs. Yeobright's impression is necessarily limited, and true only to the essential fact (that Eustacia did not open the door at that moment) is borne out by the reader's knowledge of the causal relationships leading to the closed door. Here the reader's wisdom is gained, like Hardy's, through "recording diverse readings," that is, seeing the event from every possible point of view, and making sense of them all. It is

Mrs.Yeobright's unfortunate fate that she dies without deciphering correctly her confused impressions. Similarly, Bathsheba Everdene Troy's limited wisdom is achieved by her recognizing, as "forced upon her by chance and change," that Gabriel Oak, and not Francis Troy, is the embodiment of what is good in a man. She obtains "flashes" of enlightenment from the lightning which forces upon her consciousness the form of Gabriel struggling with her to save her year's harvest; Troy's actions toward herself and the dead Fanny Robin are thrown into lurid relief in Bathsheba's mind when she sees him standing in her doorway; similarly, the ill-considered actions of an idly sent valentine, a hasty marriage to the wrong man, another promise of marriage made too soon, come again before Bathsheba when she sees her returned husband in the doorway of Boldwood's home at the Christmas party.

Again, the impressions of life Hardy's characters' experience are largely visual impressions. Moreover, the most critical moments in their lives, and necessarily the turning points of the novels, are visual experiences, "unadjusted impressions." Vision, and all its degrees from blindness to clarity, becomes a working metaphor for wisdom and insight, and the experiences of seeing, observing, recording impressions and making associations between them move the character to the level of understanding Hardy designs. Visual experiences define the level of understanding of each character at every critical juncture of life, mirror the psychological state of the character, and, if traced, become the essence of his stories.

The artistic personality behind this expression is easy to discover. A man keenly sensitive to his visual experiences, always finding

associations between disparate events or things he witnesses, and "humbly recording diverse readings" of life's phenomena, is revealed throughout his personal writings. "A letter lies on the red velvet cover of the table;" he writes in an 1888 diary entry, "staring up, by reason of the contrast. I cover it over, that it may not hit my eyes so hard" (Early Life, p. 276). The same sharp vision, and a natural sense of perspective and association, are revealed in the next entry:

> A service at St. Mary Abbots, Kensington. The red plumes and ribbon in two stylish girls' hats in the foreground match the red robes of the persons round Christ on the Cross in the east window. The pale crucified figure rises up from a parterre of London bonnets and artificial hair coils, as viewed from the back where I am. The sky over Jerusalem seems to have some connection with the cornflowers in a fashionable hat that bobs about in front of the City of David . . . when the congregation rises there is a rustling of silks like that of the Devils' wings in Paradise Lost.
>
> (Early Life, p. 276)

The anecdote is typical of Hardy, and similar to his fiction, in many ways. His initial connection (or contrast) between the figures in the congregation and the figures in the window is visual: the colours of the girls' hats match the colours of the robes of the persons round the crucified Christ. From that association the two images of the representation of Christ and the colours on the people in the congregation are superimposed: "the pale crucified figure rises up from a parterre of London bonnets" (italics added). The "artificial hair coils" are noticed with particular cynicism as an indiscreet form of vanity compared to the agony portrayed by the "pale crucified figure." He defines his personal perspective, his point of view of the event: "viewed from the back where I am;" he recognizes that his

particular experience is valid only from that perspective. He continues with the visual connection between the scene in the stained glass window and the congregation with the association "the sky over Jerusalem seems to have some connection with the cornflowers in a fashionable hat." His entry ends with a chilling association between the artificiality and vanity of the "fashion-conscious church-goers" and the Devils rising from the fiery floor of hell in Paradise Lost. The implied contrast between that image and the crucified figure in the east window is sharp. The mass of visual impressions, the workings of a mind seeing a connection between disparate visual images and looking for deeper associations between them, is evident in Hardy's personal as well as artistic writings.

The visual experience can be intellectually disinterested, as in his experience at St. Mary Abbots, or intensely emotional, as suggested by Hardy's description of a Dorchester execution he witnessed when he was eighteen. Biographers recognize this experience as a profound one in Hardy's development,[10] and critics recognize it as an important indication of Hardy's visual orientation.[11] I would suggest that however profound the experience may have been for the psychological development of the young artist, the visual techniques evident in the piece have not been fully acknowledged. An examination of the incident is beneficial: the young Hardy, having rushed from his breakfast table to a hill on the heath, puts the brass family telescope to his eye:

> The sun behind his back shone straight on the white stone facade of the gaol, the gallows upon it, and the form of the murderer in white fustian, the executioner and officials in dark clothing and the crowd below being invisible at this distance of nearly three miles. At the moment of his placing the glass to his eye the white figure dropped downwards, and

> the faint note of the town clock struck eight.
> The whole thing had been so sudden that the glass nearly fell from Hardy's hands. He seemed alone on the heath with the hanged man, and crept home wishing he had not been so curious.
>
> (Early Life, p. 37)

Norman Page notes that the experience

> has the ingredients of many an incident in the fiction: the stark contrast of the figures--the murderer in white fustian, the officials in dark suits--like a sketch by Goya or Daumier, the sun reflected on 'the white stone facade of the gaol', the sudden, piercing glimpse by a solitary observer, distant and unseen, of a moment of decisive action or revelation.[12]

The visual clarity and sharp focus provides a sense of immediacy to the action, to be sure. Integral to Hardy's expression of experience is the "frame-like" quality of moments of crisis. The observer's reaction, however, is at least as important as his observation. Suddenly and without warning the young Hardy finds himself "alone on the heath with the hanged man," whereas moments before he had expected an impersonal spectacle before his eyes. He becomes caught in the experience he witnesses; in a sense, be becomes part of it. The understatement that he "crept home wishing he had not been so curious" confirms his emotional involvement.

To be a watcher, then, is to become involved in what you observe, and conversely involvement means watching or seeing. Indeed, in a fictional death scene from Hardy, the same elements of suddenness and horror affect the previously uninvolved observer. It is the moment following the murder of Sargeant Troy by the deranged Boldwood:

> Of those out of the house Oak was one of the first to hear of the catastrophe, and when he entered the room, the scene was terrible. All the female guests were huddled against the

> walls like sheep in a storm, and the men were bewildered as to what to do.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 402)

Gabriel's vision of Bathsheba with Troy's head in her lap arrests him:

> 'Gabriel,' she said automatically, when he entered, turning up a face of which only the well-worn lines remained to tell him it was hers, all else in the picture having faded quite.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 402; italics added.)

The same static effect, the same stark clarity of the main figure surrounded by an indefinite, at least indistinct, "frame" is apparent in that moment of crisis in Far From the Madding Crowd as in the equally alarming--for the watcher as well as the reader--incident related from Hardy's own experience. In that death scene, as in Hardy's re-telling of his observation of the execution, is the "felt moment" to which Penelope Vigar refers[13]. She aptly notes "it is the impression of the book which remains, a vision of moments which remain distinctly in the mind, a string of outstanding incidents[14]. This assessment returns us to the bewildered child at the conjuring show. Hardy's characters, whether watchers or not, view the events of their lives as incidents in which they are child-like observers: they often cannot grasp the significance of what they witness, do not understand the causal relationships from one impression to the next, often find themselves hopelessly confused, and sometimes find that they have tragically erred.

This visual technique is found in most consistent application in Hardy's earlier works. Before moving to the single, personal focus of a Michael Henchard, Tess Durbeyfield or Jude Fawley, Hardy dramatizes and explores the nature of perception from disparate points of view in

novels which have no single protagonist. Novels such as Under the Greenwood Tree and Far From the Madding Crowd identify problems in perception; The Return of the Native takes human blindness further, into more disastrous conclusions. These works will be examined to reveal Hardy's treatment of human insight as a function of visual awareness, and to determine a development in style. In addition, I shall examine The Woodlanders as a work related to the earlier novels (by its date of conception--circa 1875--and by its basic form which focuses on a group of characters) and as the achievement of a mature Hardy (he does not put down his pen to finish that novel for Macmillan's Magazine until February 1887).

Indeed, a close examination of the novels indicates a development in his treatment of perception. Under the Greenwood Tree establishes the fact: human vision is flawed; insight is inextricably bound to experience, and experience is visual. Dick Dewy, for example, sees in Fancy a vision which is considerably more wonderful than the real person. Far From the Madding Crowd adds drama and the involvement of character: wrong action stems from lack of insight, tragedy from wrong action. Because she is a woman who wishes to control the perceptions of others, Bathsheba Everdene sends a valentine which captures too fully the imagination of the repressed Boldwood. The Return of the Native expands the concept further, adding the facet of an indifferent universe--the forces of chance--to an already complex combination of personal blindness and the interaction among characters. The antecedents of the closed door scene, for example, are chance events as well as the deficient insights of its participants. And in The Woodlanders Hardy combines the techniques of its predecessors as well to add the

dimension of environment and society to characters' problems with perception. The deficiency of human insight becomes entangled with the unalterable situation of birth: Little Hintock forms a backdrop behind those (like Giles Winterborne) who cannot understand the surface of society and those (like Felice Charmond) who cannot understand invisible emotions.

Throughout these novels the bewildered child is easy to identify: he or she is the hopeful parent wishing the best for the child, the lover wishing fulfillment. The conjuring show changes: it is at first the accident of a moment's chance or indecision, later the accidents of birth and station. Yet throughout, the visual effect is strong: it is the visual experience which informs us of our transgressions, whether social or individual; it is the visible which ironically blinds us to the real; and it is our blindness which ensures the invisible quality of truth.

Chapter One

Under the Greenwood Tree

Hardy's penchant for the visual and an awareness of the psychological impact of the "seen" experience is evident in so early a novel as Under the Greenwood Tree. The tale, "penned so lightly, even farcically and flippantly at times,"[1] quite naturally reveals the distortions of reality caused by the individual perspective. No single character, hence no one, has a complete and accurate view of reality. To his neighbours old William Dewy's character depends upon their own particular frame of mind when they see him; Dick Dewy's impression of Fancy is based upon visual impressions, often from afar; Fancy yields to the temptation of Maybold's marriage proposal from a visual contrast between the vicar and Dick. No one always sees what is really there. Indeed, Hardy himself identifies the difficulty of clear perception as an unavoidable fact of life:

> The Hyprocisy of things. Nature is an arch-dissembler. A child is deceived completely; the older members of society more or less according to their penetration, though even they seldom get to realize that nothing is as it appears.
>
> (Early Life, p. 231)

The characters of Under the Greenwood Tree themselves relate to experience through the way they see and what they see or do not see. The limitations and distortions of individual human vision (insight) are expressed and focused often through the uses of framing devices such as

doors and windows. In this chapter I shall examine the visual techniques Hardy applies to the critical moments of Under the Greenwood Tree, and to the interrelations of its characters--visual techniques which portray the limitations and distortions of the individual perspective.

Indeed, human distortions and limitations are expressed at a number of points in the novel. His neighbours' opinion of him, for example, depends, not upon William Dewy's actions, but rather upon their current psychological state:

> to his neighbours he had no character in particular. If they saw him pass by their windows when they had been bottling off old mead, or when they had just been called long-headed men who might do anything in the world if they chose, they thought concerning him, 'Ah, there's that good-hearted man--open as a child!' If they saw him just after losing a shilling or half-a-crown, or accidentally letting fall a piece of crockery, they thought, 'There's that poor weak-minded man Dewy again! Ah, he's never done much in the world either!' If he passed when fortune neither smiled nor frowned on them, they merely thought him old William Dewy.
>
> (UGT, Part 1, p. 43).

The description reveals the extent of involvement of the watcher in the experience; William Dewy's character changes but little, but the reaction of his friends changes according to their own experience. Therefore the distortions caused by the individual psychologies are apparent. Barbara Hardy notes that this description reflects the author's sharing his "descriptive authority . . . provisionally with his characters, while reserving his own total knowledge."[2] Professor Hardy goes on to suggest that "good judgement and wisdom are native to Mellstock."[3] Yet the very unclear and untrue impressions his neighbours hold of the elder Dewy seem to suggest quite the opposite. The descrip-

tion tells a much more significant truth: what you feel about others depends upon your own relation to them and to reality at the moment of vision. This half-real view humanity seems to have of itself for Hardy is repeated in the public opinion of Gabriel Oak at the opening of Far From the Madding Crowd:

> to state his character as it stood in the scale of public opinion, when his friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was rather a good man; when they were neither, he was a man whose moral colour was a kind of salt and pepper mixture.
>
> (FMC, Ch. i, p. 41).

The way you view your fellow man depends upon your own outlook at any given moment. This kind of description has, of course, the much more serious and dramatic analogue in Fancy's reaction to the two men at her school-house.

Hardy's emphasis upon the importance of vision and the visual experience can be expressed dramatically, in the scene which triggers Fancy's betrayal of Dick, or narratively, in Dick's growing infatuation with the school mistress. Hardy's penchant for what is visible and how it is seen also appears in the more comical scenes, and provides a background motif for the novel. Both Dick Dewy in his first visit to Fancy and the members of the quire in their visit to the vicar are painfully conscious of the watching eyes of others on their actions and their lives. Dick, while desperately attempting to gain Fancy's attention, also attempts not to gain the attentions of her neighbours: he "disguised his feelings from some suspicious-looking cottage-windows opposite by endeavouring to appear like a man in a great hurry of business, who wished to leave the handkerchief and have done with such

trifling errands" (UGT, Part 1, p. 83). Similarly the group of musicians calling upon the vicar attempt to disguise their actions from suspected watchers:

> At Reuben's ring the more modest of the group turned aside, adjusted their hats, and looked critically at any shrub that happened to lie in the line of vision; endeavouring thus to give a person who chanced to look out of the windows the impression that their request, whatever it was going to be, was rather a casual thought occurring whilst they were inspecting the vicar's shrubbery and grass-plot than a predetermined thing.
>
> (UGT, Part 2, p. 97)

These actions suggest the conflict between what is our purpose in acting and what we wish others' perception of that purpose to be. On the one hand actions are rather obvious and open; this idea is, of course, much more fully expressed by the mature author of The Woodlanders: "in the still water of privacy every feeling and sentiment unfolds in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder" (W, Ch. ii, p. 41). On the other hand, the knowledge of the openness of one's actions brings forth a desire to disguise the motive, to protect oneself from the watchful eyes of others. While I do not suggest that a complex system of disguise, betrayal and limited perception is expressed in the humourous description of the quire members hovering about the vicar's shrubbery, I would maintain that the author of Under the Greenwood Tree is consciously aware of the many nuances of vision, and the effect of the visual experience.

This idea is again humourously portrayed in the rather stilted conversation between old William Dewy and Mr. Maybold. "Mr. Mayble," says the elder Dewy, "I hope you'll excuse my common way, but I always

like to look things in the face." The two men stare uncomfortably at each other, then out of the window: "Mr. Maybold and old William looked in the same direction, apparently under the impression that the things' faces alluded to were there visible" (UGT, Part 2, p. 100). The fixed gazes, the almost static scene, the constant orientation to vision--these are Hardy's trademarks. And what is in these humourous scenes a lighthearted treatment of the nature of vision surfaces in the portrayal of the major characters of the novel.

Considering that Fancy is a central character in the novel, we are told very little of her feelings and emotions until she sits down by her window to see Dick coming to her house "wet through" and Maybold arriving beneath his silk umbrella. Yet of Dick Dewy we learn a great deal; and his experience of the governing influence of his life, Fancy Day, is carefully delineated. The development of Dick's fascination, infatuation and love is told through his reaction to the visible essence of his love. He learns of her first through seeing her boot at the shoemaker's, watches her in her window from below, and regards her as something to be watched; in short, he learns of her (if he learns at all) through what he sees. That his impressions are somewhat short of the truth is revealed to him several times, but his hesitations about her are immediately disregarded upon further presentation of the visible essence herself.

Dick's fascination, as I stated, begins before he has even seen the woman. He sees her boot at the shoemaker's, and surveys it "with a delicate feeling that he had no right to do so without having first asked the owner of the foot's permission" (UGT, Part 1, p. 46). Dick's curiosity is further kindled by the allusion to the attractiveness of

her face. "What about her face?" he asks of the shoemaker (p. 48). That face reveals itself in another distinctly framed scene as sharply focused in the reader's mind as in Hardy's. The Christmas carollers, among whom Dick is one, visit the schoolhouse from which Fancy appears:

> an increasing light made itself visible in one of the windows of the upper floor. It came so close to the blind that the exact position of the flame could be perceived from the outside. Remaining steady for an instant, the blind went upward from before it, revealing to thirty concentrated eyes a young girl framed as a picture by the window architrave, and unconsciously illuminating her countenance to a vivid brightness by a candle she held in her left hand, close to her face, her right hand being extended to the side of the window. She was wrapped in a white robe of some kind, whilst down her shoulders fell a twining profusion of marvellously rich hair, in a wild disorder which proclaimed it to be only during the invisible hours of the night that such a condition was discoverable.
>
> (UGT, Part 1, p. 55)

While this description has been likened to the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in its precise description of the beauty,[4] it also tells much about the watchers' sensibilities. They are all moved by the beauty of the young schoolmistress, the young Dewy most of all, who remains at the scene, enraptured by the view. He is found "leaning motionless against a beech tree . . . his arms folded, his head thrown back, his eyes fixed upon the illuminated lattice" (UGT, Part 1, p. 58).

Fancy's introduction in this manner certainly does more than merely befit her role as the "attractively illuminated" heroine, as Penelope Vigar suggests.[5] The importance of the experience is emphasized in Dick's reaction to the scene, where his mind plays "an exhaustive variation upon the incidents that had passed that night in connection with the school window" (UGT, Part 1, p. 61). The fascination, therefore, is based upon the visual impression of the woman at the

window. Dick's view of her is similar to that of his father, who says she is as "near a thing to a spiritual vision as ever I wish to see!" (UGT, Part 1, p. 55). Indeed, Dick sees her at the Christmas party as a vision, or, perhaps more accurately, sees her as a person and is disturbed that she is in fact not a vision:

> Dick cast his eyes over his grandfather's shoulder, and saw the vision of the past night enter the porch-door as methodically as if she had never been a vision at all. A new atmosphere seemed suddenly to be puffed into the ancient edifice by her movement, which made Dick's body and soul tingle with novel sensations.
>
> (UGT, Part 1, p. 163)

His expectation of the "vision" he sees at the schoolhouse window, and his sight of her later are rather obvious methods of dramatizing his infatuation; yet is is not difficult for us to anticipate in this love affair the infatuation Eustacia Vye convinces herself she will experience for Clym Yeobright before she ever sets eyes upon the man.

The "confused heap of impressions" of Fancy Day continue to appear before Dick's eyes as he struggles to assure himself that this lovely creature has deep feeling for him. He is said later to recall in detail the room of the Christmas party "like a picture in a dream" (UGT, Part 1, p. 76) as he could the details of the Christmas morning service at which Fancy was present (p. 64).

The visual experience, then, informs Dick that Fancy is a beautiful and engaging woman. His impressions, what he sees of her (or what he allows himself to see--he admits that she must be polite enough to dance with Farmer Shiner, even though he feels she is too accomodating) tell him of a certain person. Two experiences plant doubt in his mind: the

kind regard Fancy displays for the admiring looks of Farmer Shiner and his man along the road, and the disregard she displays for Dick when he visits her for an afternoon outing. The first experience is enough to cause Dick to wonder, "was she a coquette?" while the actual scene before him, the road and the scenery, become "as a thin mist over the real pictures of his mind" (UGT, Part 2, p. 123).

The second experience is enough to provoke him into administering what he thinks is a harsh punishment, not calling upon her at the appointed time. His realization is insightful: "far from being the simple girl who had never had a sweetheart before [she was] a woman who had had no end of admirers; a girl certainly too anxious about her frocks". (p. 155). "In fact," we are told "it is just possible that a few more blue dresses on the Longpuddle young men's account would have clarified Dick's brain entirely, and made him once more a free man" (156). Despite this insight he renounces his "freedom" at the sight of the beautiful--though sincerely repentent--woman (157). The very sincere repentence is followed--though unknown to Dick--by a very serious shortcoming: Fancy's promise of marriage to Maybold. Yet the young man will live, happily, it is assumed, despite the fact that his vision of reality is not a true one.

The weaknesses of human vision, and the power of the visual experience, then, are evident in this portrait of Dick Dewy. Despite the fact that Fancy is essentially saved from shame by the vicar's scrupulousness, and that Dick's one move of "punishment" produces a profound effect on his "coquette," the reader is left with a certain discomfort in the awareness of the inadequacies of the human insight.

The inadequacies of human insight, and the distorted view of

reality, are perhaps best expressed in the character of Fancy Day. And the turning point of the novel--the moment which thrusts the novel beyond the range of the purely comic--is Fancy's witnessing Dick Dewy, soiled by the rain, approach her house, while she also watches the vicar appear beneath his silk umbrella. The scene is remarkably precise: Fancy is placed at her window (a characteristic technique Hardy uses to present an "unadjusted impression" before his character's eyes, and to focus a scene while removing extraneous information). She sees the mist over the Grove and the approaching figure of her intended. Fancy's basic sensibility, founded on appearances and surface truths, is grated by the sight of "how plain and sorry a man looks in the rain, with no umbrella, and wet through" (UGT, Part 4, p. 181). Moments later she is unexpectedly swayed by the contrast of the elegant and handsome vicar. It is the visual contrast, experienced in a sharply framed impression, which creates the conflict in Fancy's mind and plays upon her weakness:

> Sitting here and thinking again--of her lover, or of the sensation she had created at church that day?--well, it is unknown--thinking and thinking she saw a dark masculine figure arising into distinctness at the further end of the Grove--a man without an umbrella. Nearer and nearer he came, and she perceived that he was in deep mourning, and then that it was Dick. . . .
>
> As he vanished she made as if to descend from her seat; but glancing in the other direction she saw another form coming along the same track. It was also that of a man. He, too, was in black from top to toe; but he carried an umbrella.
>
> He drew nearer, and the direction of the rain caused him so to slant his umbrella that from her height above the ground his head was invisible, as she was also to him. He passed in due time directly beneath her, and in looking down upon the exterior of his umbrella her feminine eyes perceived it to be of superior silk--less common at that date than since--and of elegant make. He reached the entrance to the building, and Fancy suddenly lost sight of him. Instead of pursuing the roadway as Dick had done he had turned sharply round into her own porch.
>
> (UGT, Part 4, pp. 180-182)

The scene is rich and deep in significance. Of Dick Fancy notices only his "plain and sorry look," and a "nasty patch of something" on his shoulder. Of the vicar, who boldly enters her porch rather than speaking to her through the window, she notices the "warm flush upon his face and . . . bright flash in his eyes." The effect is an overpowering temptation for Fancy to accept the proposal of the vicar.

This visual scene brings to the surface a tendency we have suspected in Fancy all along: the tendency to love admiration, praise, and refinement. She disregards the motivations of Dick's visit and is affected only by his appearance; similarly, by being favourably influenced by Maybold's appearance she disregards the deeper reality of the dishonesty to herself, to Dick, and to Maybold in her acceptance of the marriage proposal. [That the approach, departure, and another approach of two men towards a school-house, watched by a woman sitting at her window, can have such a powerful emotional and thematic impact, is a technique which Hardy of all writers can master.] Even in the course of so early a novel there is a scene which, almost entirely through visual associations, comments profoundly on the lack of human insight into experience. The "little yawn" which Fancy covers with her hand jarringly dramatizes her obtuse attitude towards a man who will donate his best coat for a dead friend, give away his only umbrella to another, and walk a mile out of his way "from sheer wish of spending ten minutes in her presence" (UGT, Part 4, p. 180).

That brief visual experience at the school-house defines an undercurrent of deceit in the novel which resurfaces, appropriately enough, at the novel's end. Hardy clearly wishes to show that distorted or wrong-headed vision will compromise any wish for pure happiness.

Fancy's vow to keep no secrets from Dick "from to-day" clouds the happy resolution with which the novel closes and, as J. Hillis Miller notes, makes Under the Greenwood Tree "consistent with the other novels in the way the possibility of tragedy lies just under the surface."[6]

The idiosyncracies of individual character, then, provide a distortion of reality which results in action not always appropriate for that character. That we see the action at times through the eyes of the character (as with Fancy) and at times from the more distant view of the narrator (as with the quire and, at times, with Dick), heightens the ironic tone: the limitations of the personal view are much more obvious when viewed from a larger perspective. This is not to say that the narrator, or the reader, is omniscient. As Norman Page comments:

> One of Hardy's most characteristic narrative devices is to invite the reader to contemplate a number of verbal 'pictures': the narrator . . . is himself a spectator, not the artist--and, like us, he seems to be driven to make what deductions he can from the visible evidence."[7]

Indeed, I would add that in addition to the reader and the narrator, the character as well is driven to make what deductions are possible from the visible evidence presented. What the character, narrator, reader and novelist see are all slightly different facets of the same stone, reality. Ultimately a true view can never be achieved; it can only be approximated. And what is suggested in Under the Greenwood Tree as a general problem with perception is to be dramatized in Far From the Madding Crowd as a function of individual personality. Dick's simple desire to see Fancy as a vision is replaced by Farmer Boldwood's repressed personality, ready to leap to any convenient conclusion; Fancy's weakness for elegance is replaced by Bathsheba's very

idiosyncratic method of viewing the worth of others. The distortion caused by personality and character produce, not comic irony as in Under the Greenwood Tree, but disaster.

Chapter Two

Far From the Madding Crowd

> I was thinking a night or two ago that people are somnambulists--that the material is not the real--only the visible, the real being invisible optically. That it is because we are in a somnambulistic hallucination that we think the real to be what we see as real.
>
> (Later Years, p. 243)

This 1887 diary entry by Hardy in many ways indicates the real source of tragedy in Far From the Madding Crowd: most of his characters either do not interpret correctly what they see, or do not see what is real at all. Because the real is invisible, they make disastrous mistakes, and awaken to the real when it is too late to change the course of things. In Under the Greenwood Tree this idea was tentatively touched upon: the influence of the vicar's appearance on Fancy leads her to a dangerous point, and Dick Dewy's visual impression of Fancy in effect blinds him to her faults. This tendency to see only the visible part of reality, the surface, is explored on a deeper level, with more disastrous consequences, in Far From the Madding Crowd. Hardy again forms his plot around a rural setting and a web of love affairs, but this time adds a generous blend of conflict, blindness and madness to his story. The "confused heap of impressions" is again placed before the characters' eyes--the destruction of a pastoral "kingdom," an idly sent valentine, the midnight discovery of a dead woman and child in the same coffin, the sudden reappearance of a deserted husband. Yet for the most part the characters miss the real and see only the visible; each is

a bewildered child for whom the experiences occur from a sequence of events misunderstood or entirely unseen. Without this knowledge of the sequence of events, these experiences are all the more devastating. It is only he who can piece together the connection between the real and the visible who can learn from experience.

In Far From the Madding Crowd Hardy develops the visual techniques employed earlier. Almost every dramatic turning point in the story is a visually static scene viewed by one or more of the players, and the player's reaction to the scene becomes part of the expression. Gabriel pausing in his despair over the destruction of his flock, Boldwood's arrested gaze at the red seal of an anonymous valentine, Bathsheba's devastation on opening a coffin holding Troy's first lover and infant--these are only some of the "confused heaps of impressions" presented to them. Indeed, Ian Gregor identifies the power of Far From the Madding Crowd in what he terms the "interior landscape" of the novel, which is the visual reaction of the characters to experience. These are for Gregor "still moments" in which Hardy "can concentrate the passion that surges through this novel":

> It is this intense projection of feeling which is central to our experience of the novel, energising it, driving it inexorably forward from crisis to crisis, charging the narrative and giving us a first, and dominant, impression of the novel as it unfolds.[1]

Those isolated visual moments comment on the development of the characters, mirror their psychological states and, if traced, are the essence of the story. It is the visual experience that distinguishes the levels of understanding of the characters; and it is the moments of crisis in Far From the Madding Crowd which show the power of that experience.

Hardy also provides in Far From the Madding Crowd something he did not in the earlier novel--indeed, something which he rarely provides--a foil to the folly of others: Gabriel Oak. This character follows Hardy's own edict, that "the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change" (CP, p. 84). This is the artistic suggestion that a keen sense of perception and a clear mind can carefully consider the miscellany of experience and govern one's life accordingly. That others in the novel fail to meet this standard heightens the irony and lessens the tragedy of their quite painful experiences. Gabriel Oak cannot control his experiences, granted, and he cannot prevent disaster despite his insight (Boldwood's murder of Troy is an excellent example); but he does analyse the events of his life and govern his future actions accordingly. In fact, Oak's character and presence in the action of the novel actually becomes part of the "confused heap of impressions" the other characters experience. He is most often isolated, viewed by others from a distance, as removed from their general pattern of life. They cannot understand him, nor, in any real sense, get close to him.

The opening of the novel, and our introduction to Gabriel Oak, provides an interesting insight into his character and establishes a method of visual expression which pervades the novel. We are first presented with his appearance, then a short insight into his character, then an impression of how he is seen by others:

> When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were within an unimportant distance of his ears. . . .
> His Christian name was Gabriel, and on working days he

> was a young man of sound judgment, easy motions, proper dress, and general good character . . . Or, to state his character as it stood in the scale of public opinion, when his friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was rather a good man; when they were neither, he was a man whose moral colour was a kind of pepper-and-salt mixture.
>
> Since he lived six times as many working days as Sundays, Oak's appearance in his old clothes was most peculiarly his own--the mental picture formed by his neighbours in imagining him being always dressed in that way.
>
> (FMC, Ch. i, p. 41)

Our impression of him, his own impression of himself, his neighbours' impression of him--these are all facets of the same person, yet each different from the others, and none alone a complete statement. This description of Oak, and the "incident" which follows, is a paradigm of following scenes, critical and incidental, in Far From the Madding Crowd. The opening chapter (not unlike the opening of Under the Greenwood Tree which contains Dick Dewy's first romantic view of Fancy Day) establishes the visual context of experience and vision as a method--sometimes the only method--of obtaining information about experience and about another person. The description of Gabriel Oak is only valid when we have seen him from many points of view. The reference to his neighbours' opinion of him--that it is very dependent on their own frame of mind at any instant of view--reinforces the idea that perception of reality is distorted by the circumstances of the viewer.

An interesting scene furthers this idea and reinforces the visual context as Gabriel, whose "moral colour" we have seen from different angles, watches the yet unnamed Bathsheba as she watches herself in the mirror atop her waggon. A pragmatic and observant Oak (he can tell time by the stars) quite naturally draws a "cynical inference" from the

scene:

> There was no necessity whatever for her looking in the glass. She did not adjust her hat, or pat her hair, or press a dimple into shape, or do one thing to signify that any such intention had been her motive in taking up the glass. She simply observed herself as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind, her thoughts seeming to glide into far-off though likely dramas. . . . Still, this was but conjecture, and the whole series of actions was so idly put forth as to make it rash to assert that intention had any part in them at all.
>
> (FMC, Ch. i, p. 44)

Gabriel's quite accurate statement shortly thereafter to the gate-keeper that Bathsheba's greatest fault is vanity tells us as much about him as about her: he was "perhaps a little piqued by the comely traveller's indifference" and "glanced back to where he had witnessed her performance over the hedges" (FMC, Ch. i, p. 45).

The layers of meaning in the "seen" experience, the difficulties in understanding others and experience itself (even Bathsheba's motives in admiring herself are only "conjecture"), are all present in these early scenes. The profound effect upon Farmer Boldwood of an idly sent valentine, Troy's entry upon Bathsheba beside the coffin of Fanny Robin and her child, Boldwood's murder of Troy--all these scenes involve the visual experience, misinterpreted or misunderstood according to the idiosyncracies of the participants. The "bewildered child" attempts to construct meaning from the conjuring show of impressions, and often fails.

To explore how his characters fail in their perceptions of reality, however, Hardy presents us with the foil of Gabriel Oak. We have

already seen how his character is viewed from several different angles. He is one who, in the final analysis, can see himself in a manner not totally self-centred:

> among the multitude of interests by which he was surrounded, those which affected his personal well-being were not the most absorbing and important in his eyes. Oak meditatively looked upon the horizon of circumstances without any special regard to his own standpoint in the midst.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xliii, p. 321)

What sets him apart is the ability which he has gained through learning from experience. What makes him human--and more credible as a character--is his unflinching love for the very imperfect Bathsheba.

Oak arrives at this very true "philosophy of life" particularly through an experience as devastating to him as the experiences of Boldwood, Bathsheba and Troy are to them. The difference is that Oak is not limited by his own point of view. The first turning point for Oak is the loss of his flock. The young farmer, alerted to danger by the bells of his ewes, emerges from his hut and searches frantically but in vain for the two hundred pregnant ewes. The realization of their fate is impressed upon him by the errant dog:

> He passed through the trees and along the ridge of the hill. On the extreme summit, where the ends of the two converging hedges of which we have spoken were stopped short by meeting the brow of the chalkpit, he saw the younger dog standing against the sky--dark and motionless as Napoleon at St. Helena.
>
> (FMC, Ch. v, p. 72)

The dark silhouette against the sky, representing much more action than it has, the sudden vision of that image by the watcher--these are

Hardy's trademarks. The "horrible conviction" which passes through Oak is the realization of the story represented to him by that motionless figure.

Oak's basic insight, his intelligence, if you will, is reflected in his ability to construct, after a momentary stupor, his coming fate (and the negation of the pastoral ideal) and to recognize, as Daniel Schwarz notes, "that the world is not what he thought it was."[2] His experience keenly impresses itself on his consciousness as he looks up, having uttered his thanks for not having a wife to share his coming poverty:

> By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon, which had only a few days to last--the morning star dogging her on the left hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating the reflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water. All this Oak saw and remembered.
>
> (FMC, Ch. v, p. 73)

The dead and dying ewes, the motionless dog against the sky, the ineffective fence erected by human hands--"chance and change" in the form of natural phenomena--have conspired to defeat the young farmer. And the very static, visual impression he is left with impresses its lesson of universal indifference upon him. The contrasting images of the pool "like a dead man's eye" and the awakening world perhaps also impress upon Oak a sense of his own insignificance in relation to the permanence of larger things (indeed, he verbalizes this thought later when he questions the value of running risks against the elements when he battles to save Bathsheba's harvest from rain). The knowledge that arises from this experience is one which Oak shares with few other Hardy

characters: on discovering that the world is not suited to his own self-interests and desires, he adjusts his interests and actions accordingly. As Ian Gregor notes, Hardy presents "a casualness in Oak, when we first meet him, which never recurs."[3] The foolishness of an uninsured farmer, the carelessness of leaving a dead lamb as a meal for his dogs, are replaced by the pragmatism, forethought and competence necessary to manage, eventually, the affairs of the two large farms of Bathsheba and Boldwood. His "moment of vision" by the pool is confirmed when we encounter him two months after his tragedy:

> He had sunk from his modest elevation as pastoral king into the very slime-pits of Siddim; but there was left to him a dignified calm he had never before known, and that indifference to fate which, though it often makes a villain of a man, is the basis of his sublimity when it does not. And thus the abasement had been exaltation, and the loss gain.
>
> (FMC, Ch. vi, p. 75)

Gabriel applies a different technique to his future actions: the ability to see not only what is immediately before him, but also what is around him. He has the "indifference to fate" which comes from recognizing his own insignificance in the larger scheme of things. This insight actually becomes a part of his isolation: he always sees more than others see, he knows that his own role is insignificant. Yet he is still powerless to control fate, to prevent Bathsheba's foolish actions, or to stop the crazed Boldwood from shooting Troy.

Thus Oak's initial tragedy modulates his expectations of life, gives him an "indifference to fate," and makes him wary of the indifference of fate. This exemplary human being is one who can govern his own actions according to a sensible plan, one based not only on his

own desires and impressions, but based as well upon his experience of life. Yet others do not so govern their lives, even when presented with the example of Gabriel Oak (whose name suggests the very positive solidity he expresses in his actions). They do not understand his way of life; his example becomes lost as he himself becomes part of the "confused heap of impressions" of the experience of others. As previously mentioned, the very concept of perception is explored in the first description of Gabriel as he is viewed by people of his parish: their views of Oak are distorted by their own disparate situations: "when his friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was rather a good man" (FMC, Ch. i, p. 41). Indeed, on the whole Gabriel is viewed by others most often as a function of their own personal situation than as himself, a practical man with considerable wisdom. He becomes an isolated character, removed from the general pattern of life. He is often seen from a distance as an example, granted, but as an example which cannot be followed because it cannot be understood.

Gabriel's isolation is suggested even on our first meetings with him. Chapter two describes his shepherd's hut as "a small Noah's Ark on a small Ararat," his isolation evident from this early point. He is a lone man atop a rick battling a fire, a lone figure atop another rick fighting rain, a figure "like the black snuff in the midst of a candle-flame" to an agitated Boldwood. His house is viewed by Bathsheba, anxiously awaiting his return to her services to save her bloated sheep, as "a white spot on the opposite hill, backed by blue firs" (FMC, Ch. xxi, p. 172). In times of others' inner stress and storm, he appears as a calm figure, almost from another world, whose

inner peace contrasts with their existence, and whose superior wisdom rankles and confuses them. Indeed, this is exactly the experience of Bathsheba when she speaks to her at the grinding of the shears, hoping at first for an acquiescence to her wishes to quell the rumours of her association with Boldwood, then hoping for a declaration of love from Gabriel. She must settle for neither: she comes expecting her forsaken lover to be only a dutiful--and blind--servant, and finds a lecture on her actions and a knowledge, which was unexpected, of her private conduct. The exchange between the two is summarized in visual terms; Gabriel could see Bathsheba in "the cold morning light of open-shuttered disillusion" (FMC, Ch. xx, p. 167). For Bathsheba, then, to approach the static figure of "Eros" as "represented when in the act of sharpening his arrows" is to be reminded of her own shortcomings. Her questioning of Oak and her illogical and emotional reaction are understood when we realize she actually did not wish such a reflection of her inner self. She wished knowledge--of a very limited and half-true nature--to go one way only, from herself to him.

That Bathsheba is forced to recall him only twenty-four hours later from the house which appears as a "white spot" to save her sheep emphasizes the strength of his character and his position. But his return to her permanently, after her "winning smile", reinforces his humanity: his love for this flawed woman, in a sense, prevents at this point, her moral development. She had won another point from him.

Gabriel, however wise and pragmatic he is seen to be, is also subject to the power of the visual experience. It is the visual reminders of his tragedy, such as the "pool like a dead man's eye" which impresses reality upon him. It is the visible reality of Bathsheba

which keeps him near her, and most often effaces "his perception of the great difference between seeing and possessing" (FMC, Ch. viii, p. 105). Indeed, his only errors beyond his initial tragedy are of a minor nature, and these most often involve Bathsheba. His love for her, his loyalty, and his weakness for her love are summarized in his entry to the scene of the murder of Troy. We are told that when Oak "entered the room, which was about five minutes after Boldwood's exit, the scene was terrible. All the female guests were huddled aghast against the walls like sheep in a storm, and the men were bewildered as to what to do." (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 402). The central focus in Oak's vision, the "sole spectacle" in the room, is Bathsheba:

> 'Gabriel,' she said, automatically, when he entered, turning up a face of which only the well-known lines remained to tell him it was hers, all else in the picture having faded quite. 'Ride to Casterbridge instantly for a surgeon. It is, I believe, useless, but go. Mr. Boldwood has shot my husband.'
>
> (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 403; italics added.)

The sharp focus on Gabriel's love, the "blurring" of all other visual information--these elements define his visual experience and its emotional impact. Moreover, it is another "confused impression;" it is unexpected, powerfully devastating, and for a goodly time inexplicable. Gabriel's own questions as he rides to Casterbridge tell how little he has gathered from that brief impression as well as how it has affected his perception of another impression:

> What had become of Boldwood? He should have been looked after. Was he mad--had there been a quarrel? Then how had Troy got there? Where had he come from? How did this remarkable reappearance effect itself when he was supposed by many to be at the bottom of the sea?. . . . He rode on, in the

> excitement of these self-inquiries not discerning, when about three miles from Casterbridge, a square figured pedestrian passing along under the dark hedge in the same direction as his own.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 403).

The pedestrian is, of course, Boldwood, on his way to "deliver himself up" to the authorities. But at this point Oak is as bewildered as anyone with less insight. He does not know the sequence of events which led to the murder--a sequence the reader has seen in dramatic detail--and his knowledge of the personalities involved could neither predict nor prevent the tragedy. That he does not recognize Boldwood as the "square-figured pedestrian" is admittedly of small importance; however it does reflect the profound effect of the scene he has just witnessed. Even the sharpest natures miss some details.

Gabriel's love for Bathsheba, and the watersheds of his relationship with her, are disclosed to a large measure by visual information, and by his own efforts to make sense of his impressions of her. Often we are told little of his feelings (such as when Bathsheba dismisses him from her employ for his bluntness concerning her actions towards Boldwood), but when we are, it is in the form of one endeavoring to make sense of a "confused heap of impressions." His experiences with Bathsheba in saving her ricks from rain, for example, tells much about Gabriel's perception. That scene is strongly visual, despite the fact that it occurs in darkness and the only light provided is that of the lightning flashes. Gabriel sees a "female form" from his perch atop the rick, and soon after sees the forms of himself and Bathsheba, side by side. He recognizes his insignificance, indeed, the insignificance of "love, life, everything human . . . in such close juxtaposition with an

infuriated universe" (FMC, Ch. xxxvii, p. 279). But he also recognizes, and attempts to make sense of, his feelings for and association with Bathsheba: "Oak had hardly time to gather up these impressions into a thought, and to see how strangely the red feather of her hair shone in this light, when the tall tree on the hill . . . seemed on fire to a white heat" (FMC, Ch. xxxvii, p. 280; italics added). Oak attempts to place every impression in juxtaposition with others. He is constantly assessing his impressions, and even though he cannot always interpret them correctly, or even at times interpret them at all, he recognizes their importance. These impressions on the rick tell him again of his feeling for her, his respect for her natural courage, and, when she tells him of her hasty marriage to Troy, of her honesty and candour. Possibly Gabriel's most devastating experience, save his witness of the death of two hundred pregnant ewes, is his vision of Sargeant Troy comfortably surveying the morning scene from the window of Bathsheba's bedroom:

> Oak fancied he saw the opening of a casement in one of the upper windows. . . . A handsome man leaned idly from the lattice. He looked east and then west, in the manner of one who makes a first morning survey. The man was Sargeant Troy. . . . They stood by the gate awhile, Gabriel listlessly staring at the ground. His mind sped into the future, and saw there enacted in years of leisure the scenes of repentence that would ensue from this work of haste. That they were married he had instantly decided.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xxxv, p. 265-266)

The distance between Gabriel and the upper window defines the chasm which has been placed between himself and his love, Bathsheba. And the appearance of the man--the worst possible man--at a window focuses Gabriel's attention (and ours) on the undeniable facts.

The man at the casement, Sargeant Troy, like Gabriel Oak beneath, is revealed more through our witnessing his actions than through knowing his thoughts. From his actions and his slick cajolery we learn that he has lived his life according to the desires of the present and, "being entirely innocent of the practice of expectation, was never disappointed. . . . His outlook upon time was as a transient flash of the eye now and then" (FMC, Ch. xxv, p. 197). He attempts neither to interpret the past nor anticipate the future. For Hardy this is the recipe for disaster. Troy seduces Fanny, and loses her; he beguiles Bathsheba and ruins her. And it is only when he is presented face to face with the spectre of his past actions--when he enters his home to find his wife standing over the coffin of his lover and infant--that he realizes what he has done. Even then he escapes and abdicates his responsibility. He returns more than a year later with scarcely a recognition of the upset he has caused. For the reader his end is the logical conclusion to one who refuses to look past the surfaces of his life. Troy is one of many bewildered children who cannot understand what is before them. The only difference between Troy and others of his kind is that for the most part he watches the "conjuring show" with no desire to piece together the confused impressions of his existence. And he enjoys the show until the image of the dead Fanny is raised before his eyes.

An interesting opinion regarding the characterization of Troy has been raised by Peter Casagrande, who finds that the Sargeant compares favourably with Bathsheba, who "errs because she is a woman and therefore innately and irremediably flawed":

> Troy is portrayed to a degree as one capable of better things who has been pushed into error by the circumstances of

> his birth, his profession as a soldier, and by the susceptibility of women to his gallantry. His vanity and heartlessness are not seen as inherent or incurable.[4]

Professor Casagrande, however, provides not a shred of evidence to support this opinion. Rather, an examination of Troy's character as it is expressed through his lack of insight and his experiences suggests quite the opposite conclusion.

Even Troy's intelligence is a defect in this frame:

> He had a quick comprehension and considerable force of character; but, without the power to combine them, the comprehension became engaged with trivialities whilst waiting for the will to direct it, and the force wasted itself in useless grooves through unheeding the comprehension.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xxv, p. 198)

It is his own deficiencies, the lack of power to combine his comprehension with his force of character, which produces the waste. Granted, there is within him a potential for "better things," as Casagrande has suggested, but there is no suggestion that he has been "pushed into error" by the circumstances of his existence; rather, he is pushed into error by the very nature of his character.

Troy exhibits to others a personality quite different from the real person; in this way he is the very embodiment of deceit:

> He spoke fluently and unceasingly. He could in this way be one thing and seem another; for instance, he could speak of love and think of dinner; call on the husband to look at the wife; be eager to pay and intend to owe.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xxv, p. 198)

This short description tells as much of our perception of reality as of Sargeant Troy. Like Gabriel Oak, the true person is not what appears

before the eyes of others (however, the description of Gabriel Oak as his neighbours saw him involved distortions caused by others' mood at any given moment; in this description of Troy, the man himself is responsible for the distorted impression others have of him). Troy's true nature is brought to light for the reader in three short examples: his is a nature inherently insincere, deceitful, and dishonest. Indeed, the presentation of Troy as something different from what he appears prepares us for Bathsheba's alarming discoveries that, while attractive and desirable on the surface, Troy is an incurable gambler, an irresponsible farmer, and a man whose moral character does not withstand close scrutiny. Even his disappearance, one may suggest, is only the appearance of death and is therefore appropriate to his characterization. It is perhaps to Bathsheba's credit that of all people she is the least convinced of his death. Yet until faced with his immoral behaviour in the form of the dead Fanny and infant, she too is fooled.

Troy embodies, then, the notion Hardy himself puts forward that "the material is not the real--only the visible, the real being invisible optically" (Later Years, p. 243). Indeed, the "real" Francis Troy is one who is hidden behind the fluent soldier. It is only when the "somnambulistic hallucination" is broken by the power of circumstance (Bathsheba's experiences, for example) that the real becomes evident.

The consequences of Troy's moral idiocy, his adherence to the present only, is brought to him in full force by his discovery of the dead Fanny and child being viewed by Bathsheba. The experience is for Troy a visual one; that experience, and the day of confused action that follows, force him for once to face the consequences of his actions in a

way he has never had to do before. We turn to the moment of his arrival upon the scene: we see him having been angered by, and only dimly concerned about, Fanny's breaking of their appointment at the bridge near Casterbridge; and we see Bathsheba, following tortured thoughts of Fanny's last hours and her husband's actions, having opened the coffin to find the worst possible truth:

> He beheld it all by degrees, stared in stupefaction at the scene, as if he thought it an illusion raised by some fiendish incantation. . . . So little are instinctive guesses the fruit of a legitimate induction that, at this moment, as he stood with the door in his hand, Troy never once thought of Fanny in connection with what he saw. His first confused idea was that somebody in the house had died. . . . The candle was standing on a bureau close by them, and the light slanted down, distinctly enkindling the cold features of both mother and babe. Troy looked in, dropped his wife's hand, knowledge of it all come over him in a lurid sheen, and he stood still.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xliii, p. 325)

The entire aspect of the scene--the powerful impact of the visual experience, the enkindled features of the dead suggesting in the most painful way Troy's sins, his unpreparedness for the scene--brings Troy's past actions into the present in one devastating sight. And, different as they are in kind, this experience shares the same tenor as Oak's entering upon the murder scene later in the novel, and even young Hardy's raising a telescope to his eye to see a hanged man drop from the gallows. Experience is visual; when one least expects it, the "conjuring show" provides a confused and painful sight. Yet this is not to say that Troy could not have been prepared for the experience. Our narrator reminds us that, while Troy made an "instinctive guess" that someone in the house had died, the process of "legitimate induction" may

have suggested the possibility that Fanny, in breaking her appointment may have been ill; if ill, perhaps dead; if dead, where else would her body be sent but to the house in which she served? Indeed, as we learn later, it is only moments before he enters the room that Troy suspects that Fanny may have been "prevented by illness from keeping her promise" (FMC, Ch. xlv, p. 336). Nevertheless, he is unprepared, and in his shock, remorse, and renewed love for Fanny thoroughly rejects Bathsheba and deserts her.

In mawkish remorse, Troy purchases a tomb and plants flowers over Fanny's newly-made grave. A second painful recognition of his real self follows hard upon the first: he discovers the next morning that his sentimental flower-planting has been circumvented by a heavy rainfall and the "doings" of the gargoyle. It is a moment of insight which he has before sedulously avoided but now cannot deny. His experience is again a visual one; having attempted a gesture of atonement to Fanny, and finding the result of his efforts to be completely undone, the tomb splattered with mud, he views the grave:

> The sight, coming as it did, superimposed upon the other dark scenery of the previous days, formed a sort of climax to the whole panorama, and it was more than he could endure. Sanguine by nature, Troy had a power of eluding grief by simply adjourning it. He could put off the consideration of any particular spectre till the matter had become old and softened by time. The planting of flowers on Fanny's grave had been perhaps but a species of elusion of the primary grief, and now it was as if his intention had been known and circumvented . . . it seemed to be only in the nature of things that matters would right themselves at some proper date and wind up well. This very morning the illusion completed its disappearance, and, as it were, all of a sudden, Troy hated himself.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xlvi, p. 343)

The very visual experience of his thwarted romanticism reveals to him the distorted way he has approached reality. And the revelation is visual both in its physical form and in its implications: the sight is "superimposed upon the other dark scenery," his "illusion" of himself and his life "completed its disappearance" and he hates himself for what he is, rather than, as he has in the past, loving himself for what he can say and do.

He escapes Weatherbury, and is plagued by thoughts of Fanny in "vivid pictures which threatened to be indelible" (FMC, Ch. xlvii, p. 348). Yet little more than a year later, this man, so devastated by the sight of unearthed flowers on a path, is ready to call the actions which followed "humbugging sentiment" (FMC, Ch. lii, p. 390). Our next--and last--view of him shows a mind still firmly focused on the present, blinded both to the past and to the future. Speaking to Pennyways, Troy remarks on what the present has revealed to him: "She's a handsome woman, Pennyways, is she not? Own that you never saw a finer or more splendid creature in your life" (FMC, Ch. lii, p. 386). He has forgotten his reasons for leaving, the devastation and grief over Fanny, and recalls only the physical environment that surrounds Bathsheba at the present. "There she is," he remarks to Pennyways as he prepares to go to Boldwood's party, "with plenty of money, and a house and a farm, and horses, and comfort, and here am I living from hand to mouth--a needy adventurer" (FMC, Ch. lii, p. 390). He has also forgotten Boldwood's threats against him when he first married Bathsheba, and Pennyways' suggestion that the moody farmer is still in love with and again pursuing Bathsheba. Moreover, he elects to return to his wife "in the middle of Boldwood's Christmasing." In short, he has all the information at

hand to prepare him for--and avert--disastrous consequences. However, as happened when he enters his home to find Bathsheba standing over a coffin, he ignores the logical deduction, partly because the truth does not fit his present expectations, and partly because he is too obtuse to recognize the very real danger in Boldwood.

Boldwood, the man who discharges the gun at Troy, is to a large measure the victim of his own weaknesses. Like Troy, Boldwood's method of insight is remarkably self-centred. However there is a real difference in the expression of the insight. Troy endeavors not to make sense of his impressions, but rather allows them to glide before him in an unceasing panorama, halting only when he is absolutely forced to do so. Boldwood, on the other hand, attempts desperately to make sense of his impressions, and to make them fit a predetermined course. He is shocked to discover that he is absolutely powerless to govern his impressions, and that his logic has been erroneous. The course of his life is described to a large measure in visual terms: he at first does not see, does not even notice Bathsheba. However, once piqued into noticing and seeing her, he sees nothing else. He governs his hopes, his desires and his conclusions according to what we know is an idly sent valentine. His rejections from Bathsheba confuse and madden him because he has not understood others nor even the logic of events (his second pursuit of Bathsheba involves a denial of the possibility of Troy's return). His obsession with Bathsheba to the obliteration of all else makes his frenzy in murdering Troy on the fated Christmas eve believable.

Boldwood himself is again, like Gabriel Oak and Francis Troy, not entirely what he appears on the surface. However, we are cautioned that

with this man the real is perhaps dangerously close to the visible as we are told that Bathsheba has unwittingly enticed the wrong man:

> Luckily for her present, unluckily for her future tranquility, her understanding had not yet told her what Boldwood was. Nobody knew entirely; for though it was possible to form guesses concerning his wild capabilities from old floodmarks faintly visible, he had never been seen at the high tides which caused them.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xviii, p. 153)

Boldwood's repressed nature shows on his face, but because "he had never been seen at the high tides" of emotion, his true nature remains hidden. The "wild capabilities" are thrown into action by the carelessly executed but enigmatic effect of the anonymous valentine from Bathsheba.

Yet before he is brought to notice her by this contrived device, Boldwood does not see her at all, either in a physical or an intellectual sense. He does not, amid many who do, notice her at the market, nor in church. On overtaking her gig on the road, he "never turned his head once, but with eyes fixed on the most advanced point along the road, passed as unconsciously and abstractedly as if Bathsheba and her charms were thin air" (FMC, Ch. xii, p. 126).

This "blind eye" is transformed into one which sees a red seal bearing the inscription "marry me" as "a blot of blood on the retina of his eye" (FMC, Ch. xiv, p. 132) when he receives the anonymous letter. This effect of Bathsheba's valentine is described in visual terms, the physical act of Boldwood's eye riveted on the seal and the letter mirroring the sudden and irrevocable obsession of this repressed man. The entire scene of "the effect of the letter" is full of the visual, imaginative associations Boldwood makes of the presence of that letter

in his home. Hardy establishes Boldwood's grave mistake in thinking the motive of the valentine serious, and his identity as one "bewildered child at a conjuring show," is reflected in a short editorial comment:

> The vast difference between starting a train of events, and directing into a particular groove a series already started, is rarely apparent to the person confounded by the issue.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xiv, p. 132)

Boldwood attempts to put a form to the sender:

> The vision of the woman writing, as a supplement to the words written, had no individuality. She was a misty shape . . . whenever Boldwood dozed she took a form, and comparatively ceased to be a vision: when he awoke there was the letter justifying the dream.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xiv, p. 133)

So strong is his imaginative impulse at these moment that he sees the unknown woman's hand flow across the page, attempts to see her face, attempts to put some meaning into what we know is an idle thought. However, beyond the actual letter, the only form that appears before his eyes is his own face, reflected in the weird light of his room, "wan in expression, and insubstantial in form. He saw how closely compressed was his mouth, and that his eyes were wide-spread and vacant" (FMC, Ch. xiv, p. 134). Boldwood's crucial error lies in not recognizing and checking a too intense feeling over a very flimsy conclusion. Again, he draws a conclusion from an imcomplete vision; he attempts to force meaning onto a confused impression, and fails: the "same fascination that caused him to think it an act which had deliberate motive prevented him from regarding it as an impertinence" (FMC, Ch. xiv, p. 133).

Indeed, Boldwood continues, once he has seen her, to look for meaning in Bathsheba's actions even from a distance. His confusion is great:

> Perhaps in her manner there were signs that she wished to see him--perhaps not--he could not read a woman. The cabala of this erotic philosophy seemed to consist of the subtlest meanings expressed in misleading ways.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xviii, p. 155).

Boldwood's love-making to Bathsheba is described in terms of sight. While we--and she--are aware that he is blind to the casual circumstances of his sudden affection for her, Boldwood is not. That he takes this lack of knowledge--blindness, in a sense--and considers it an new-found vision is both ironic and pathetic. "My life," he tells Bathsheba after they have moved to a private spot away from the sheep-washing, "is not my own since I beheld you, Miss Everdene...we all change, and my change, in this matter, came with seeing you" (FMC, Ch. xix, p. 159). It is little wonder that Bathsheba's agitation on hearing his declaration of love is great. While she is too keenly aware of her own careless advance, and sees his vision as false, he expresses his love as a new-found vision. Boldwood's blindness and confusion over Bathsheba's reticence is again reflected in visual terms when his loved one ends the interview: Boldwood "dropped his gaze to the ground, and stood long like a man who did not know where he was" (FMC, Ch. xix, p. 162).

Much later, after Boldwood has been once rejected by Bathsheba and convinces her, by an emotionally charged entreaty, to promise herself to him, the same tenor of his first moments of fascination returns, and

with it the same visual associations. Moments after he has extracted her promise to marry him, and only seconds before the entrance of Troy into the room, the farmer lapses again into drawing conclusions which are, at best, six years away, and at worst, non-existent: he is "so absorbed in visions arising from her promise that he scarcely saw anything" (FMC, Ch. liii, p. 399). The shattering of these illusions comes with Troy's arrival, brings "a frenzied look" to Boldwood's eye, and causes him to shoot at his adversary.

That Boldwood is completely obsessed by Bathsheba, and that she is taken away from him--twice--by Troy, makes the murder a logical conclusion to Boldwood's chapter. Indeed, his action is suggested as early as his first disappointment, when he meets Bathsheba on the road after she has written to him that an engagement cannot be between them. He rages at the thought of Troy, threatening to punish him bodily for the "reckless theft" of his "one delight." He does not hear Bathsheba's pleas to be kind to Troy because he is caught up in another vision, one of violence:

> Boldwood's ideas had reached that point of fusion at which outline and consistency entirely disappear. The impending night appeared to concentrate in his eye.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xxxi, p. 237)

To a reader conscious of these aspects of Boldwood's character, his obsession, a blindness to logical possibilities, a mind focussed on future events or past actions rather than on present realities (consider the treasure-house of articles stowed away for "Bathsheba Boldwood"), the murder comes as little surprise. This is not to say the scene lacks dramatic impact: on the contrary, it is marvellously orchestrated by

Hardy; but in retrospect one can see the pattern of Boldwood's character unfolding throughout the novel.

There is one moment, and one only, when Boldwood acts completely for the present, and sees completely clearly. It is the moment after Troy's arrival at the Christmas party when Bathsheba draws away from her husband's grasp, and Boldwood shoots him. For once Boldwood sees the present in the light of the past, and possibly foresees the future in light of the present: when "Bathsheba had cried . . . Boldwood's face of gnashing despair had changed. The veins had swollen, and a frenzied look has gleamed in his eye" (FMC, Ch. liii, p. 401). Then he sees that his only escape is also death, and he attempts to shoot himself. That he is prevented "by a timely blow by Samway" from killing himself does not detract from the appropriateness of his own death[5]. He sees the reality that Bathsheba will never be his, in fact, has never been his, not even momentarily.

In the centre of these three men, the steady Gabriel Oak, the slick-tongued Francis Troy, and the repressed William Boldwood, is Bathsheba Everdene. Drawn by three such strong forces in three very disparate directions, Bathsheba's character exhibits the only reaction possible: confusion. She is drawn to Boldwood out of a sense that she was "the one who began the game" with the valentine, and that the farmer is an exemplary character. Yet she is drawn by Troy who provides open-faced flattery of her and a spirit dashing enough to master her. And she is constantly aware of the presence of Gabriel, of whose love she is aware but whose self-control and right-minded conscience at first vexes and, in the end, wins her.

Bathsheba is in the main a high-spirited, intelligent and competent

woman. Throughout the novel we are reminded of her superior nature and abilities. She is an "Elizabeth in brain and a Mary Stuart in spirit" (FMC, Ch. xx, p. 164); in a moment of crisis when everyone is paralyzed, she reveals that "her philosophy was her conduct, and she seldom thought practicable what she did not practise" (Ch. liv, p. 402-3). As Ann-Marie Coughlan notes,

> Hardy's conscious creation of this superiority in Bathsheba commands respect and admiration. He clearly creates a heroine whose wilful sovereignty makes the reader accept her as a forceful individual who is the embodiment of human strength--not merely an unusually gifted woman.[6]

Indeed, Bathsheba is an extraordinary woman. She takes over the management of a large farm and handles the corn-market with poise and competence amid an astounded group of male farmers. She is also aware of her superior competence; and yet herein perhaps lies her greatest fault and her most dangerous lack of insight. Superiority by definition demands comparison with and observation of others, and Bathsheba is aware of and constantly monitoring how she is perceived by others. From this stems the confusion which so troubles her life.

Bathsheba is described as striking a balance between vanity and dignity; attributes which of necessity involve the perceptions of others. When she encounters Oak along the path at Norcombe, at an early moment in the novel, she is keenly aware of his perusal:

> That the girl's thoughts hovered about her face and form as soon as she caught Oak's eyes scanning the same page was natural, and almost certain. The self-consciousness shown would have been vanity if a little more pronounced, dignity if a little less.
>
> (FMC, Ch. iii, p. 55).

Indeed, even our first view of Bathsheba expresses this very self-conscious sensibility: sitting atop her waggon, she takes up a small mirror to survey herself "as a fair product of Nature in the feminine kind" (FMC, Ch. i, p. 44). To view herself as others see her, to be aware of and control what others see of her--these motivations define and determine Bathsheba's actions. Appropriately enough, it is Gabriel Oak who sees her in the novel act of admiring herself in a mirror out-of-doors. And throughout, it is Gabriel's scrutiny which causes Bathsheba much discomfort. Only a short time after their first meeting, we recall, Oak witnesses Bathsheba's antics in lying back on her horse to pass beneath low boughs hanging over the path. During the conversation along the same path later, Gabriel reveals he has seen this rather novel method of horsemanship. She is embarrassed and angered by his observation of what she is rather than what she appears to be. Bathsheba subsequently avoids the young farmer:

> The young woman came regularly to milk the healthy cow or to attend the sick one, but never allowed her vision to stray in the direction of Oak's person. His want of tact had deeply offended her--not by seeing what he could not help, but by letting her know that he had seen it. For, as without law there is no sin, without eyes there is no indecorum; and she appeared to feel that Gabriel's espial had made her an indecorous woman without her own connivance.
>
> (FMC, Ch. iii, p. 56)

So thoroughly is Bathsheba's self-perception based upon what others see of her that she appears--and further events confirm that she is--upset by others seeing a less-than-perfect image of her. Indeed, she frequently attempts to control the perception others have of her character and her actions. She angrily bursts in upon an overheard

conversation among her servants to assert, confusedly, that she does not love Troy (Ch. xxx). And she reacts adversely to Gabriel Oak, when Bathsheba attempts to convince him, and have him convince others, that she and Boldwood are not likely to be married. Not only is she frustrated that she cannot control his opinion of her, she is also mystified and confused that he has such a clear view of her, and that he can so easily (it appears) control his own feelings for her:

> Bathsheba would have submitted to an indignant chastisement for her levity had Gabriel protested that he was loving her at the same time; the impetuosity of passion unrequited is bearable, even if it stings and anathematizes--there is a triumph in the humiliation, and a tenderness in the strife. This was what she had been expecting, and what she had not got. To be lectured because the lecturer saw her in the cold morning light of open-shuttered disillusion was exasperating.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xx, p. 167; italics added.)

The visual reference defines Bathsheba's emotion. She is exasperated at being seen clearly by Oak through emotion which would have blinded a lesser man. The embarrassment is the same kind as she felt at being observed at antics in horsemanship; greater, because her indiscretion is more blameworthy and the witness more self-assured. It is little surprise that, in her agitated state, she dismisses Oak there and then for his honesty. She is both offended and confused by his brutal honesty. (That she eventually confides in Gabriel about her feelings and her actions over Troy indicates that her moral development is of some durability.)

Another person whose opinion and impression of her Bathsheba attempts to control is Boldwood. Her actions towards him are also expressed in visual terms. She is conscious, "without looking within a

right angle of him," of Boldwood's indifference to her (FMC, Ch. xii, p. 125); and she is further annoyed that he does not deign to turn her way in passing her gig on the way from the market or sitting in church the following Sunday (FMC, Ch. xii, p. 126; and Ch. xiii, p. 129). Her vexation at this "black sheep among the flock" is thus described as a visual experience: the farmer will not deign to look at her, and she has seen his indifference. Her desire to direct his vision and her annoyance at his lack of feeling is a visual impression:

> Boldwood's had begun to be a troublesome image--a species of Daniel in her kingdom who persisted in kneeling eastward when reason and common sense said that he might just as well follow suit with the rest, and afford her the official glance of admiration which cost nothing at all . . . it was faintly depressing that the most dignified and valuable man in the parish should withhold his eyes.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xiii, p. 130)

Once she has this attention, however, she rues the seeking of it. As early as the next market-day she regrets her impertinence in sending the valentine. "His eyes, she knew, were following her everywhere" (FMC, Ch. xvii, p. 150); indeed, Boldwood's pursuit is unrelenting until the moment he lays down his gun after murdering Troy.

Troy provides Bathsheba with the unsought admiration she desires from Boldwood, with none of the insight into her faults she dreads from Oak. Her first view of the Sargeant--and his of her--is visually startling. Bathsheba is caught unawares, flattered by his unabashed praise of her beauty and disarmed by his easy manner. The combination masters her. She meets him when her dress becomes entangled in his spur as they pass each other along the dark path outside her home:

> A hand seized the lantern, the door was opened, the rays burst out from their prison, and Bathsheba beheld her position with astonishment.
>
> 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. Gloom . . . was now totally overthrown, less by the lanternlight than by what the lantern lighted. The contrast of this revelation with her anticipations of some sinister figure in sombre garb was so great that it had upon her the effect of a fairy transformation.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xxiv, p. 193)

The stark visual impression of the dashing soldier has a remarkable effect upon Bathsheba; the contrast between what she had been expecting and what she sees blinds her to Troy's affectations. This "fairy transformation" reverses the contrast between expectation and reality that she experienced in her conversation with Oak only days before; whereas Oak's blunt opinion of her conduct had contrasted with her positive expectations, Troy's attractiveness is in contrast to her expectations of a "figure in sinister garb." That she is attracted by Troy's favourable "reflection" of her (which in turn reflects his personality--he is attracted by what the moment presents him, and in this case it is Bathsheba's beauty) is thrown into further relief by an added editorial comment which closes the chapter: it was "a fatal omission of Boldwood's that he had never once told her she was beautiful" (FMC, Ch. xxiv, p. 186). Bathsheba finds in Troy, then, a favourable reflection of her own desires: she intensely desires praise; he offers lavish compliments.

This response to Troy's attraction to her takes an interesting form in the scene of Troy's sword exercise. Bathsheba is both the entire audience and object of the exercise, a role she finds thrilling and

novel. The scene is described, from Bathsheba's point of view, as a spectacular visual display of which she is the centre:

> In an instant the atmosphere was transformed to Bathsheba's eyes. Beams of light caught from the low sun's rays, above, around, in front of her, well-nigh shut out earth and heaven--all emitted in the marvellous evolutions of Troy's reflecting blade, which seemed everywhere at once, and yet nowhere specially. These circling gleams were accompanied by a keen rush that was almost a whistling--also springing from all sides of her at once. In short, she was enclosed in a firmament of light, and of sharp hisses, resembling a sky-full of meteors close at hand.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xxviii, p. 216)

Troy's entire approach to her is one of complete attention to her person, rather than Boldwood's self-absorbed pursuit and Gabriel's clear-minded criticism. It is little wonder that she falls so completely in love with the gallant soldier.

That Bathsheba's self-centred way of looking at reality is necessarily limited and distorted is forced upon her on several different occasions. When she stands paralyzed before Fanny's coffin, and then sees Troy lean down to kiss the dead woman and say "in the sight of Heaven you are my very, very wife" (FMC, Ch. xliii, p. 327), Bathsheba realizes Troy's attraction to her has been very superficial indeed. What is even more painful to her is that she has been eclipsed in love, beauty, and even the dignity of dying, by the frail Fanny lying in the coffin. And Troy's "you are nothing to me" is the most painful sting. (FMC, Ch. xliii, p. 327). She cannot bear the painful scene longer, and flees to spend the night outdoors near the dismal swamp.

Much later Bathsheba sees Troy again, this time when he comes to

claim her. Already agitated and confused by Boldwood's insistence upon her promise of marriage--or at least of engagement--she sees Troy re-enter her life as a vision. This time it is not the awareness of others' perception of her which motivates Bathsheba, it is the awareness of the consequences of her own confused actions. As Ian Gregor notes, while the first half of Far From the Madding Crowd "belongs to the schemers, Bathsheba for Boldwood, Troy for Fanny and then for Bathsheba; the second half releases forces where the schemers are no longer in control."[7] Indeed, it is at this moment that Bathsheba finally realizes she has lost control: Troy has returned, reviving her memory of the terrible moments over Fanny's coffin; Boldwood is nearby: Bathsheba is wearing the heavy diamond ring the farmer has pushed her to wear as a symbol of their engagement. Her experience is a visual one, and the reaction to it a shock which deprives her of vision:

> The poor girl's wretchedness at this time was beyond all fancy or narration. She had sunk down on the lowest stair; and there she sat, her mouth blue and dry, and her dark eyes fixed vacantly upon him, as if she wondered whether it were not all a terrible illusion. . . . The truth was that Bathsheba was beyond the pale of activity--and yet not in a swoon. She was in a state of mental gutta serena; her mind was for the minute totally deprived of light at the same time that no obscuration was apparent from without.
>
> (FMC, Ch. xliii, pp. 400-401)

The visual shock Bathsheba experiences at Troy's reappearance is part of the major crisis of the novel. The scene reflects the very imperfect vision and insight of all the characters involved and is itself an almost static scene, highly charged with visual information. The events leading up to, including, and shortly following the murder are to the characters a very "confused heap of impressions" the causes

of which are beyond their grasp. Each character brings with him or her particular motives which are either indifferent or in opposition to the motives of others, and the consequences of the convergence of these disparate motives are disastrous. That the reader is aware of the "converging courses" and of all motives heightens the dramatic effect.

The murder scene illustrates and is the result of the very self-centred and childlike perception of all three major characters, Bathsheba, Troy and Boldwood. Each person unwittingly has contributed to the outcome, and it is only Bathsheba (and Gabriel, who enters the scene later) who has even the opportunity to put the pieces together.

The scene moves quickly from Troy's entrance at the party to the murder:

> There was an unearthly silence, all looking towards the newcomer. . . . Nobody noted Bathsheba. She was leaning on the stairs. Her brow had heavily contracted; her whole face was pallid, her lips apart, her eyes rigidly staring at their visitor. . . . The scream had been heard but a few seconds when it was followed by a sudden deafening report that echoed through the room and stupefied them all. The oak partition shook with the concussion, and the place was filled with grey smoke.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liii, pp. 400-401)

The scenes are almost deprived of motion; indeed, only Troy's movements toward Bathsheba disturb the stillness of the scene. The party-goers' silent stares at the unfolding drama, Boldwood's frozen look of despair on the recognition of Troy, Bathsheba's "eyes rigidly staring at their visitor"--all these fragments indicate the inevitability of the ensuing gunshot and the helplessness of the participants. Bathsheba is reduced to "a state of mental gutta serena" the moment she realizes the consequences of a valentine so carelessly sent long ago, and the

consequences of a hasty marriage to a man who would desert her and dare to return. She is at that moment powerless to move in any direction; and aware, as she cries later that night in her distraction, that "it is my fault" (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 405). For Boldwood, the event is even more devastating. Having blinded himself to everything but his passionate love for Bathsheba, he is brought to face the harsh reality of the very visible form of Troy in the middle of the room. As the man for whom Bathsheba represents the soul and compass of his life, and who until this moment was "so absorbed in visions arising from her promise that he scarcely saw anything" (FMC, Ch. liii, p. 399), Boldwood finds his life's purpose has come to an end:

> Troy next advanced into the middle of the room, took off his cap, turned down his coat-collar, and looked Boldwood in the face. Even then Boldwood did not recognize that the impersonator of Heaven's persistent irony towards him, who had once before broken in upon his bliss, scourged him, and snatched his delight away, had come to do these things a second time. Troy began to laugh a mechanical laugh: Boldwood recognized him now.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liii, p. 400)

His distraction over Bathsheba and jealousy of Troy dash his hopes and shame him. It is no surprise that we learn:

> When Bathsheba had cried out in her husband's grasp Boldwood's face of gnashing despair had changed. The veins had swollen, and a frenzied look had gleamed in his eye. He had turned quickly, taken on the guns, cocked it, and at once discharged it at Troy.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liii, p. 401)

The self-centred acts of the murdered man have also come to destroy him. Troy has been motivated in almost every action by a disregard (and

unawareness) of others, and by a childish attraction to whatever strikes his fancy at any given moment. He has passed off his desertion of Bathsheba for Fanny's memory as "humbugging sentiment" (FMC, Ch. liii, p. 390) and plans to return to her to enjoy a life of affluence with a beautiful woman. He disregards Bathsheba's possible feelings after a year's separation, Boldwood's involvement with his wife, and even an "awful shudder" of premonition he feels before he sets out to Boldwood's party (FMC, Ch. lii, p. 391).

Thus three people, with three very different reasons for being at this place, and three very different perceptions of reality, collide with disastrous consequences. And the reader's way of seeing the action as told by one who moves his eyes from Troy in the doorway, to Bathsheba at the staircase, to Boldwood in front of the fireplace reinforces the drama of the "converging courses." Each player reacts, indeed, each player must react, in a way which is completely self-centred. None is aware of what is in the minds of the others. Troy comes to take his place as Bathsheba's husband, without regard for her reaction or for Boldwood's presence. Boldwood fires the shotgun at Troy out of his feelings of jealousy and desperation. Bathsheba is paralyzed by shock.

Indeed, the very disparate perspectives of the three people involved, the hidden meaning behind the scene, is emphasized by the inaction, the very inability to act, of the party-goers, the witnesses in the room. Their eyes, and ours, move from Troy to Boldwood to Bathsheba (some among them having seen the drama unfolding outside and at Warren's malthouse where Troy's face is seen in the window). They have an obtuse knowledge of Boldwood's love for Bathsheba and of Troy's presence in the neighbourhood, but they have no real knowledge of the

motivations of the three or the reason for Boldwood's party. To them the scene is as much a distorted impression as it is for the players involved. To be sure, some had heard of and seen Troy's reappearance before he entered Boldwood's home, and some were aware of Boldwood's distracted love for Bathsheba, but none were prepared for the horror of the quiet and reserved farmer discharging a shotgun blast into the body of the estranged husband. It is only Bathsheba's clear statement of fact to Gabriel that "Mr. Boldwood has shot my husband" which sets "the distorted images in each mind present into proper focus" (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 403).

The party-goers' larger perspective on experience, then, does not offer any greater insight into experience (this idea is brought out much more fully in Return of the Native where Johnny Nunsuch, a boy who understands nothing of what he sees, witnesses the entire sequence of events leading up to the closed door scene). And the person who comes upon this scene, Gabriel Oak, adds yet another dimension to the scene's significance: that even relatively complete knowledge of an experience's antecedents cannot prevent what by chance and occasion will happen. Gabriel has suspected Troy's appearance in Weatherbury, he knows of Boldwood's deathly strong wish for a promise of engagement from Bathsheba, he knows that Bathsheba has resolved to pay her debt to Boldwood by giving that promise--in short--he knows all the causes, but cannot change the effect. What appears to him as he enters Boldwood's house is no less a static visual scene that what had been witnessed by others moments before:

> Troy recumbent in his wife's lap formed now the sole spectacle in the spacious room.

> 'Gabriel,' she said, automatically, when he entered, turning up a face of which only the well-known lines remained to tell him it was hers, all else in the picture having faded quite.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 403)

The language Hardy uses--Troy and Bathsheba the "sole spectacle" in the room, framed in his vision, "all else in the picture having faded quite"--reinforces the visual nature of Oak's experience. Indeed, we are further told "Oak had in some measure been prepared for the presence of Troy by hearing a rumour of his return just before entering Boldwood's house; but before he had weighted that information, this fatal event had been superimposed" (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 403; italics added).

This moment of crisis, then, brings the participants face to face with realities they have until that moment ignored or missed. Boldwood has denied the possibility of Troy's return and allowed himself to be completely absorbed in his love for Bathsheba. Bathsheba has avoided Boldwood's advances, and not reconciled her feelings of jealousy of Fanny and her belief that Troy is still alive. Troy has not taken into consideration the reports of Bathsheba's actions, Boldwood's advances, or even any possible negative effects of his reappearance at Weatherbury. For none of these characters does this experience concur with their expectations. Yet it is in many ways the logical outcome of their actions. And Hardy's method of intensely visual, static presentation reinforces the idea that experience is indeed a "conjuring show" of impressions difficult to understand. For the witnesses, and this includes Gabriel Oak, the scene is as well a confused impression, the causes of which are invisible. For Troy and Boldwood, the outcome of

this crisis is final. Troy lies dead on the floor, having ended with as little knowledge as he began. Boldwood finds in Troy's reappearance, and even his death, that his aim is hopeless; he gives himself up to the authorities and "walked the world no more" (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 402). But Bathsheba, despite her later haunting feelings of guilt, can see in this tragedy the confusions of her recent life laid to rest. Once she sees the conflicts over Troy, Boldwood, and her future resolved, she can govern her actions again. Her true worth is revealed in her steely composure following the murder:

> The household convulsion had made her herself again. The temporary coma had ceased, and activity had come with the necessity for it. Deeds of endurance which seem ordinary in philosophy are rare in conduct, and Bathsheba was astonishing all around her now, for her philosophy was her conduct, and she seldom thought practicable what she did not practise. She was of the stuff of which great men's mothers are made. She was indispensable to high generation, hated at tea parties, feared in shops, and loved as crises.
>
> (FMC, Ch. liv, p. 402)

While she goes through a period of shock following this experience, it cannot be denied that Bathsheba's superior qualities are evident at this point. Peter Casagrande has, it must be said, maintained that Hardy's description of her reaction to Troy's murder is "limited praise" in that "with the appearance of three men [Oak, the surgeon and the parson at her home] she ends her brief moment of heroism."[8] Bathsheba's "brief moment," however, is of some three hours' duration between the time Troy is killed and the men arrive at her home. During this time she has marshalled the party-goers into action, brought the body home, and dressed it in burial clothes.

That Bathsheba recognizes the consequences of her flawed vision

(she is heard throughout the night of the murder crying "it is my fault") lends her a certain degree of humility which had previously been foreign to her. On Gabriel's notice that he is leaving her she turns back to him--not to attempt to control his impression of her, but actually to discover what he thinks of her: "Gabriel, I have been uneasy in the belief that I have offended you, and that you are going away on that account. It grieved me very much, and I couldn't help coming" (FMC, Ch. lvi, p. 417).

What Oak has had since his tragedy, Bathsheba gains in glimpses after she has been forced to perceive several crises. Their romance, and Bathsheba's moral development, has grown up "in the interstices of a mass of hard prosaic reality" (FMC, Ch. lvi, p. 419). It is this "hard prosaic reality," and the unavoidable visual crises of our lives, which may eventually break us from our somnambulistic hallucination. The tragedy of Far From the Madding Crowd lies with those who do not awaken.

Chapter Three

The Return of the Native

The Return of the Native, published four years after Far From the Madding Crowd, reveals a marked development in Hardy's treatment of perception and the visual experience. What was in the earlier novel an unfolding of the limits and nature of perception is in The Return of the Native a portrayal of the kinds of perceptual impairment; it is an uncompromising narrative wherein the protagonists' deficiencies are brought to tragic, but logical, conclusions. In Far From the Madding Crowd, Hardy brings Gabriel Oak, and even the less insightful Bathsheba Everdene, to the realization that the world is not suited to their individual wants. The novel's end shows, for both characters, an adjustment to a reality they have previously denied. The protagonists of The Return of the Native, however, are unable to arrive at a fuller understanding of the reality they perceived when they began. Eustacia, Mrs. Yeobright and Clym are crushed as much by their own failure to see beyond themselves as by forces outside of their control.

The change in tone between the two novels is evident even in their opening scenes. As is so typical of Hardy, it is the visual experience which informs us. In Far From the Madding Crowd, we see Farmer Oak's smile, his eyes showing "diverging wrinkles . . . extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun" (FMC, Ch. i, p. 41). A more warm, intimate opening is scarcely to be found in the body of Hardy's fiction. And it is the same Gabriel Oak

against whose insight other characters' deficiencies are portrayed. The opening of The Return of the Native presents a backdrop which reflects the novelist's darker vision:

> A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.
>
> (RN, Bk. 1, I, p. 33)

The same sharp focus which informed the reader of the value of Gabriel Oak's character establishes in The Return of the Native a context of indifference and foreboding. The heath, while not a character, still has "a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities" (RN, Bk. 1, I, p. 35). Thus Hardy establishes a difference in tone between the two novels, both in the subject of the opening and in the visual impression we retain of it.

And it is over this "vast tract of unenclosed wild" that Mrs. Yeobright travels on the fateful thirty-first of August. She is stifled by its heat, lost in its undulations, and bitten by an adder roaming its floor. This is not to say that the heath is responsible for the downfall of Mrs. Yeobright, or for that matter, of any other character. But just as Mrs. Yeobright fails to recognize the physical difficulties in reaching her son's home that day, she also fails to recognize the larger causes of her experiences, the consequences of her actions, and the reasons for her downfall. Indeed, she is not unlike Clym or Eustacia in failing to see the forces acting upon her and the force of her actions. To use Hardy's metaphor, they are figuratively blind to their environment. They are unable to see that their actions are interrelated

with those of others, and that "their lonely courses formed no detached design at all, but were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings."[1] The constant emphasis in The Return of the Native upon sight and blindness reinforces the idea of philosophical confusion. All three characters are blinded: Clym to the larger causes of the events of his life, Mrs. Yeobright to the smaller details of hers, and Eustacia to things extraneous to her own desires. All three are guilty of self-absorption and lack of insight, and the differences in the kinds of perception are more integral to the artistic design of this novel than in the earlier works we have seen. In this chapter I shall examine the kinds and degrees of insight portrayed by Clym, Eustacia, and Mrs. Yeobright, the causes of their downfall, and the moments of crisis, visually rendered, which shape their destinies.

The metaphorical functions of vision and its failure are summed up in the returned native: Clym is physically blind to the intricacies of his temporal surroundings, and morally blind to the effects which govern his life. He sees the overall events, but has no notion of the cause and effect from which they result. Indeed, this is Clym's natural tendency, as his mother notes when following him from afar to his house:

> He appeared as a mere parasite of the heath, fretting its surface in his daily labour as a moth frets a garment, entirely engrossed with its products, having no knowledge of anything in the world but fern, furze, heath, lichens, and moss.
>
> (RN, Bk. 4, p. 297)

He is a creature who sees what is immediately before him, and nothing more. This blindness operates on a physical level from the point of his visual incapacitation, and on a psychological level throughout, in his

relations with others.

Clym's lack of insight is hinted at long before he becomes physically blind. Mrs. Yeobright prophetically attempts to convince him that her intuition about Eustacia is correct: "'You are blinded, Clym,' she said warmly, 'It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her'" (RN, Bk. 3, p. 216).

Clym is in fact a man who becomes blind almost as much because he has seen too much and in thought internalized it as because he has studied too hard. Hardy's description of Clym's "singular look" is both important in our understanding of the character and rich in its allusions;[2] it is also an important comment on life experience as a whole, and on the very visual nature of that experience. This richness can only be seen by examining what Eustacia sees through the ribbons of her mummer's visor:

> Without being thought-worn he yet had certain marks derived from a perception of his surroundings, such as are not unfrequently found on men at the end of the four or five years of endeavor which follow the close of placid pupilage. . . . Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here. . . . As for his look, it was a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding. The look suggested isolation, but it revealed something more. As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray.
>
> (RN, Bk. 2, p. 162-3)

The entire psychological make-up of Clym is a visible essence: his "parasite, thought" shows traces on his face; he is not quite "thought-worn," but his appearance indicates that "thought is a disease of the flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is

incompatible with emotional development and a full recognition of the coil of things." While experience damages the "human carcase" from the outside, introspection damages it from within. Yet Clym's fine nature, which raises him to near-tragic status, is almost visible: "the deity that lies ignomiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray." Hardy's intention to portray Clym as a character with mature possibilities is evident from this description. While it has been suggested that Clym is a representation of the prolongation of the fears and ineffectiveness of childhood,[3] Clym's description at this moment does not support such a reading.

Eustacia, we learn, is "troubled at Yeobright's presence," by his singular appearance. This effect is remarkably ironic. Eustacia at this early point is affected by a look caused largely by Clym's growing disillusionment with the very life she covets. We are soon to learn that he is disgusted with his part in the "nick-nack trade" and it is therefore little surprise that he remains on Egdon Heath rather than returning to Paris. Yet had Eustacia recognized that what she saw that first evening was the germ of his resolve to remain on Egdon Heath, she would certainly have avoided aligning herself with him. Yet align herself she does. On Clym's side, he allows only that information which confirms his good opinions of Eustacia to register in his mind. He takes no notice, for example, that Sam recognizes Eustacia to be "quite a different sort of body" than one who would enjoy teaching children, as Clym wishes to do (RN, Bk.2, p.203).

Clym's physical blindness is preceeded by a figurative one; Hardy continues to describe enlightenment in visual terms. Clym is completely aware of Eustacia's desire to leave Egdon Heath. Although his knowledge

"robs him of many an otherwise pleasant hour," he does nothing to confront the situation:

> as his sight grew accustomed to the first blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty, Yeobright began to perceive what a strait he was in. . . . Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve.
>
> (RN, Bk. 2, p. 223)

Although he recognizes his strait, he allows the "blinding halo" of his love for Eustacia to rule his better judgement. In actual fact Clym is mistaken even in judging his own "antagonistic growths." An impartial observer is quick to realize that by keeping any one of the three "growths" alive, he sacrifices the other two. Thus to retain his mother's trust in him he would have had to abandon his new calling and Eustacia as well; to ensure Eustacia's happiness he would have had to forsake his mother's trust and his desire to teach. Ultimately he keeps alive the one "growth" that is truly self-centred: his plan to become a teacher. And it is the striving for this goal that brings about his physical blindness.

Appropriately enough, he is spurred to apply himself firmly to his books after a realization that his mother and wife have had a bitter quarrel, and that, despite her earlier protestations, Eustacia has fostered a firm hope to go to Paris with him:

> This indication of an unexpected mine of hope in Eustacia's bosom disconcerted her husband. . . . But his intention was unshaken, though he loved her well. All the effect that her remark had upon him was a resolve to chain himself more closely than ever to his books, so as to be the

> sooner enabled to appeal to substantial results from another course in arguing against her whim.
>
> (RN, Bk. 4, p. 269)

Soon after he devotes his attentions so closely to his studies, Clym's eyesight fails. Yet by this "chaining himself" to his books he had already turned a "blind eye" to the desires of both his mother and wife. Before we even learn of his blindness, it is obvious that the course of action he has taken can end only in failure. His desire to sway Eustacia by proving his intellectual worth indicates an obtuseness in Clym both concerning Eustacia's firm resolve (he considers it a "whim") and her inability to be swayed by argument, logical or otherwise. After the onset of his blindness Clym's daily life becomes "of a curious microscopic sort" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 273): his physical myopia matches the psychological one (he can only feel sad at Eustacia's dismay over being sequestered on Egdon rather than realizing, as he had ample opportunity to do, that she saw him only as an escape from her "Hades").

Clym's knowledge (limited to the barest facts) of Eustacia's actions on the day of his mother's death, the rage he inflicts upon her, and his own feelings of guilt over his mother's death are as well expressed in visual terms. His eyes become "lit by a hot light, as if the fire in their pupils were burning up their substance" from feelings of guilt over his mother's death (RN, Bk. 5, p. 325). His agony is symbolized by his memory of "a vivid picture of the face of the little boy as he entered the hovel" where his mother dies (RN, Bk. 5, p. 339). As in so many other scenes related by Hardy, we have again a stark picture in the mind's eye, representing an event or crisis in life, the memory of which again conjures up all the surrounding emotions which

originally accompanied the event. The "hot light" of guilt in Clym's eyes deadens to an "icy shine" at the knowledge of Eustacia's error in not admitting his mother to their home. It is both his and Eustacia's tragic fate that his intelligence from Johnny of "the pale face of Eustacia, a masculine shape unknown" (RN, Bk. 5, p. 342), and his mother walking away from the house is as sketchy as to the real reasons of the event as before.

Clym loses his mother, then Eustacia, in his blindness and self-absorption. In a sense, he realizes this error much later, when he considers his lot--and Mrs. Yeobright's admonishments--after the happy Thomasin and Diggory Venn have left the wedding celebration at his house: "events had borne out the accuracy of her judgement, and proved the devotedness of her care. He should have heeded her for Eustacia's sake even more than for his own. 'It was all my fault,' he whispered" (RN, Bk. 6, p. 422). He is not far wrong.

Eustacia as well exhibits a blindness, while not as physically debilitating as Clym's, certainly as willful. From our first meetings with her, we find that she refuses to see what her eyes tell her is there: she blinds herself to Wildeve's faults:

> Whenever a flash of reason darted like an electric light upon her lover--as it sometimes would--and showed his imperfections she shivered thus. But it was over in a second and she loved on. She knew that he trifled with her; but she loved on.
>
> (RN, Bk. 1, p. 92)

Eustacia knows that Wildeve is not her "deliverer;" she feels he is unworthy of her, but because her great desire is "to be loved to madness" (RN, Bk. 1, p. 96), she idealizes Wildeve "for want of a better

object" (p. 98). The better object arrives in the form of Clym Yeobright who comes from the "centre and vortex of the fashionable world" as a diamond merchant. Her first encounter with him comes in an evening meeting, by chance, along the road. Although she cannot see Clym, Thomasin, or Mrs. Yeobright in the dark, she listens to their conversation, and "it seemed as if her ears were performing the functions of seeing as well as hearing" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 140). She allows her imagination to roam over "a cycle of aspects, produced by a cycle of visions" of herself and this romantic personage (p. 141) and dreams of dancing with him, the face yet unseen, as a knight in shining armour. She becomes almost immediately "half in love with a vision" (p. 143). Yet again she does not respond to her own questioning of Clym's true character: "what could the tastes be of that man who saw friendliness and congeniality in these shaggy hills?" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 141)

Indeed, Eustacia'a first real sight of Clym is as incomplete and airy as her dream was: she sees him surreptitiously through the ribbons of the Turk's visor she has donned for her mumming performance at the Yeobrights'. Yet she sees his face only, "two feet in Rembrandt's intensest manner" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 161-2), that part of Clym which we have seen reveals the most about his character. She is deeply moved:

> The effect upon Eustacia was palpable. The extraordinary pitch of excitement that she had reached beforehand would, indeed, have caused her to be influenced by the most commonplace man. She was troubled at Yeobright's presence.
>
> (RN, Bk. 2, p. 163)

The combination of Clym's natural attractiveness and Eustacia's fervent desire to be attracted to him produces a profound effect. That short,

very visual experience, and a short exchange outside the Yeobright's home, cement Eustacia's desire to meet and fall in love with Clym. She recalls that she has that evening broken her promise to meet with Wildeve, who appears to her as the "rayless outline of the sun through smoked glass" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 170). Thus Eustacia's vision is clouded (her new experience with Clym seems to provide the "smoked glass" through which she sees Wildeve), partly through the occurrence of events beyond her control (Clym's arrival), but partly through her own willingness to be misled.

Quite believably, and aided by Eustacia's firm resolve to rid herself of Wildeve (and Clym of Thomasin), the two fall in love. Their basic sensibilities, however, are opposed, as the narrator warns. "Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym"" (RN, Bk. 3, p. 187). Eustacia not only allows herself the luxury of the self-deception that Clym will take her to a gay life in Paris, she also implores him to deceive and be deceived. "Never mind what is--let us only look at what seems" she asks him when they meet on the heath (RN, Bk. 3, p. 227). As if realizing the error of this exhortation, Eustacia later accuses Clym of deceiving her by not returning to Paris as she so fervently hoped: "you deceived me--not by words, but by appearances, which are less seen through than words" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 348).

Each desires, then, what the other would discard, but both allow themselves to believe that the effect of their actions will be as they themselves wish. Their self-deception speaks both for their failure to recognize external forces as well as for their failure to forsee effect from cause:

> 'Dear Clym, you'll go back to Paris again?' Clym shook his head, and looked at the eclipse. 'If you'll go back again I'll--be something,' she said tenderly, putting her head near his breast. 'If you'll agree I'll give my promise without making you wait a minute longer.'
> 'How extraordinary that you and my mother should be of one mind about this!' said Yeobright. 'I have vowed not to go back, Eustacia. It is not the place I dislike; it is the occupation.'
> 'But you can go in some other capacity.'
> 'No. Besides, it would interfere with my scheme. Don't press that, Eustacia. Will you marry me?'
> 'I cannot tell.'
> 'Now--never mind Paris; it is no better than other spots. Promise, sweet!'
> 'You will never adhere to your education plan, I am quite sure; and then it will be all right for me; and so I promise to be yours for ever and ever.'
> Clym brought her face towards his by a gentle pressure of the hand, and kissed her.
>
> (RN, Bk. 2, p. 221)

Indeed, had Clym recognized that the strength of Eustacia's desire to leave Egdon was even near the strength of his desire to stay, or had Eustacia acknowledged the possibility of the power of Clym's feelings, neither would have entered the marriage.

Eustacia allows herself to be deceived by these appearances. And when she refuses entry to Mrs. Yeobright on the thirty-first of August, she is haunted by the "spectre of a worn out woman knocking at a door which she would not open" (RN, Bk. 5, p. 329). Her remorse and feelings of complete frustration end in her taking her own life in Shadwater Weir.[4]

Mrs. Yeobright, the person on the other side of the door, is equally as self-deceiving as are Clym and Eustacia. She is remarkably prophetic in cautioning Clym against Eustacia, albeit for the wrong reasons. She is opposed to the union mainly on the grounds that Eustacia is not a "good girl." But Mrs. Yeobright exhibits a type of

blindness quite opposite in nature to Clym's, although no less debilitating: while Clym sees only what is immediate to his senses, and does not see larger truths, his mother sees only the larger perspective, and is blind to things immediately before her, such as her son's love. "Why is it that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close?" she asks when Clym refuses to listen to her entreaties (RN, Bk. 3, p. 235). Hardy is remarkably astute in hinting early in the novel that Clym and Eustacia err while at the same time commenting on Mrs. Yeobright's weakness. His description is a double-edged sword:

> She had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it. There are instances of persons who, without clear ideas of the things they criticize, have yet had clear ideas of the relations of those things. . . . We call it intuition.
> What was the great world to Mrs. Yeobright? A multitude whose tendencies could be perceived, though not its essences. Communities were seen by her as from a distance; she saw them as . . . vast masses of beings, jostling, zigzagging, and processioning in definite directions, but whose features are indistinguishable by the very comprehensiveness of the view.
>
> (RN, Bk. 3, p. 212)

Mrs. Yeobright's perception of the world is therefore incomplete; her vision of its goings-on is of "vast masses of beings, jostling, zigzagging, and processioning in definite directions, but whose features are indistinguishable by the very comprehensiveness of the view" (RN, Bk. 3, p. 212). Indeed, this method of seeing things--itself a blindness to detail--never changes from beginning to end. The same perspective with which she has viewed the events of her life is repeated as she lies exhausted on the bed of shepherd's-thyme on the heath:

> In front of her a colony of ants had established a thoroughfare across the way, where they toiled a never-ending and

> heavy laden throng. To look down upon them was like observing a city street from the top of a tower.
>
> (RN, Bk. 4, p. 308)

Her fatal error is in applying this same mode of vision to her experience on the day of her death. Resting momentarily at the Devil's Bellows outside Clym's house, she views the scene: "from her elevated position the exhausted woman could perceive the roof of the house below, and the garden and the whole enclosure of the little domicile" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 298). Her view is comprehensive in that she knows that there are three people in the house, and that Eustacia will not open the door; however the view is also necessarily limited as regards the unseen details: the fact that Clym is asleep, Wildeve's motives for his visit, and Eustacia's hopeful error in thinking Clym will answer the door.

As I have shown, Clym's fate is that he can see only life's "microscopic" points: he sees only what is directly before his eyes, both figuratively and literally. Mrs. Yeobright is quite the opposite: she can see from afar, can see the generalities, but is blind to the specifics, and cannot see the smaller points of, for example, Clym's love for her. Thus each character views life from a slightly different angle, and with a slightly different infirmity. Through the operation of chance, and their own blindnesses, the characters are drawn toward three crucial points: to the dicing match, to the accidental encounter between Eustacia and Wildeve at the gipsying, and to the closed door. And the visual effects and framed quality of these scenes again focuses the story, mirrors the psychological states of the participants and reflects their relation to reality.

The dicing match is an interesting and pivotal point in the novel.

Here the interplay of falling-out between mother and son, jealousy, ill-considered marriages, chance meetings, wins and losses collaborate to achieve disastrous results. The scene of Wildeve, Christian and later Diggory Venn throwing dice onto a flat rock in the middle of the heath by the light of a lantern brings into focus the manoeverings of the three major characters: Diggory Venn, in order to save something for his beloved Thomasin, plays against Wildeve, who is in love with Eustacia, for the money (sent by Mrs. Yeobright) and meant partly for Clym. The narrator holds up this "impression" for his reader to peruse: we are given a sharply focussed dicing match which we can examine in it stark clarity; we are allowed to look into the eyes of the players and see their "moods of hope and moods of abandonment;" and we can also step back and see this event in the scheme of things. The frame of darkness, the focus of light onto the flat stone and the dice simultaneously give the reader a larger perspective while emphasizing the very limited one of the players. Moreover, the clarity of distance of the disinterested narration ensures the reader's involvement in the visual experience while he remains an observer of the action: "Men are drawn from their intentions even in the course of carrying them out, and it was extremely doubtful, by the time the twentieth guinea had been reached, whether Wildeve was conscious of any other intention than that of winning for his own personal benefit" (RN, Bk. 3, p. 249; italics added).

The distinct "frame" is repeated and condensed in the men's eyes:

> Both men became so absorbed in the game that they took no heed of anything but the pigmy objects immediately beneath their eyes; the flat stone, the open lantern, the dice, and the few illuminated fern leaves which lay under the light, were the whole world to them.
>
> (RN, Bk. 3, p. 248)

The dicing match is portrayed in the strikingly visual fashion at which Hardy is so adept. Venn is almost motionless throughout the match: "he would have been like a red-sandstone statue but for the motion of his arm with the dice-box;" his eyes are "reduced to a pair of unimportant twinkles" (RN, Bk. 3, p. 252). The two players are so intent on the match, on what they see immediately before them, that "the eyes of each were then so intently converged upon the stone that one could fancy their beams were visible, like rays in a fog" (p. 252). The unfolding action is actually arrested by the static description of the two players: on one side is Venn, struggling for what he believes will help his beloved Thomasin against her scheming husband; on the other is Wildeve, harboring a vague feeling of vindictiveness towards Mrs. Yeobright, and a feeling of animosity towards the reddleman. The larger concerns are recalled by the reader because, regardless of the immediacy of and visual focus of the scene, the distance between player and reader is reinforced: "one could fancy their beams were visible" (italics added).

The cool distance, carefully focused, is expressed throughout the scene. The entire "moods of hope and moods of abandonment" are visible in the men's eyes during the match. "A complete diorama of the fluctuations of the game went on in their eyes. A diminutive candle-flame was mirrored in each pupil" (RN, Bk. 3, p. 253) The diorama, an illuminated picture viewed through an opening in a darkened chamber, is an excellent image here: it is another carefully constructed "frame" which emphasizes the focus of the mind on the reality it perceives. The image of the diorama is a sharp one, sharp enough for some critics to liken the effect to another strongly visual medium, the television.[5]

Thus this crucial turning point is highly charged with visual information. The focus on the eyes and vision of the players emphasizes their relation to reality, while the objects upon which they focus, the dice, have quite another relation to the facts of the novel. The match serves both as a critical juncture in the plot (without this event, the guineas would have been presented to their rightful owners that night) and as a dramatic enactment of the operation of chance: the 100 guineas, originally meant by Mrs. Yeobright for her son and niece are won from the inept Christian by chance. Christian is enticed into the match because he encountered Fairway and the others on the road, accidentally, and won the raffle himself--by chance. Wildeve loses the guineas--his wife's as well as Clym's--to Diggory Venn, with whom "Fortune had unmistakably fallen in love" that night. (It is interesting to note, however, that in both the dicing match and in the closed door scene, Diggory Venn plays a well-meant though tragically crucial part. Had Venn not interfered in the dicing game, Wildeve would have arrived home with the 100 guineas, and it is not unrealistic to suppose that they may have ended in the right hands: indeed, handing them to Thomasin had been Wildeve's vague intention at the outset. Later, in the closed door scene, Venn is indirectly responsible for the presence at Clym's home of both Mrs. Yeobright and Wildeve, the former by overt encouragement, the latter by the "silent system" of coercion.)

The metaphor of vision, then, and the operation of chance in The Return of the Native are again encompassed in a richly visual, distinctly framed scene. It allows the reader to make what Hardy felt was a most effective stepping stone to wisdom: to use the power of observation, the ability to capture a scene, to hold it, and to step

back to observe its causes, elements and effects. That the characters, Wildeve, Venn and Christian see little or nothing of the larger "frame" of darkness within which they play, but everything of the immediate scene, becomes part of the meaning of the sequence. Completely unintentionally, indeed, in opposition to their intentions, the three players sow irrevocable harm for themselves and others while engaging in the match. Yet, while the rattling dice are clearly framed on the stone, almost illuminated by the "rays" of their vision, the effects upon the lives of Clym, Mrs. Yeobright and Thomasin are completely in darkness, conceivably completely out of their minds.

Also important to the action and to the portrayal of the relation to reality of the major characters is the chance meeting at the Egdon gipsying of Eustacia and Wildeve. This framed scene is remarkably similar to the scene of the dicing match, though the focus is large; instead of a small lighted rock, there is the dark grass lit by the moon; instead of the abandoned rattle of the dice there is an abandoned dance. Yet the scene reveals the paradoxical relation of the visible and the real, what Hardy referred to as a "somnambulistic hallucination" (Later Years, p. 243).

A large part of the fascination with which Wildeve and Eustacia view each other (and have viewed their mates) rests on the notion of inaccessibility, and nowhere does this notion break into their understanding more than in their accidental meeting at the village gipsying at East Egdon. Again, the understanding of the other's desirability comes as a new vision, and the scene is tightly framed, lit by a bright moon and surrounded by an area of darkness:

> The pale ray of evening lent a fascination to the experience. There is a certain degree and tone of light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tenderer moods; added to movement, it drives the emotions to rankness, the reason becoming sleepy and unperceiving in inverse proportion; and this light fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon. All the dancing girls felt the symptoms, but Eustacia most of all. The grass under her feet became trodden away, and the hard, beaten surface of the sod, when viewed aslant towards the moonlight, shone like a polished table. . . . A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience within this maze of motion from her experience without it. . . . She had entered the dance from the troubled hours of her late life as one might enter a brilliant chamber after a night walk in a wood. . . . As for Wildeve, his feelings are easy to guess. Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love, and he was at this moment in a delirium of exquisite misery. To clasp as his for five minutes what was another man's through all the rest of the year was a kind of thing he of all men could appreciate.
>
> (RN, Bk. 4, pp. 283-84)

The distinct visual frame of darkness, the scene of the dance lighted within, again provides the focus for the emotional experience, and lends it a fantasy-like atmosphere: the "players appeared only in outline against the sky. . . . The pretty dresses of the maids lost their subtler day colours and showed more or less of a misty white." (RN, Bk. 4. p. 283). It is the "certain degree of tone and light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses," and it is the light on the very scene which "fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon" which is responsible for the delirious abandon the estranged lovers feel. Indeed, Eustacia's emotions are kindled by visible attraction of the scene: "she had entered the dance . . . as one might enter a brilliant chamber after a night walk in a wood." She is not fully aware that it is mainly the scene which has kindled her emotions for Wildeve (as Hardy would indicate): the "tone of light . . . tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses . . . the reason becom[es] sleepy and

unperceiving in inverse proportion . . . this light fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon." Indeed, she revels in the fact that her reason has become "sleepy and unperceiving": "whether his personality supplied the greater part of this sweetly compounded feeling, or whether the dance and the scene weighted the more therein, was a nice point upon which Eustacia herself was entirely in a cloud" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 283). On Wildeve's side the scene as well provides a renewed focus for his emotions: "obstacles were a ripening sun to his love," as he, too, becomes caught in the same "tone of light" which captures Eustacia.

Indeed, the powerful effect of this framed scene, and the converse effect of the "vast, unenclosed tract" of Egdon Heath, is reinforced in Hardy's description of the two walking away together: "to an eye above them their faces would have appeared amid the expanse like two pearls on a table of ebony" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 286). The glow of their attraction, and the highly emotional and sensual scene, lingers on their faces and is brought into relief by the darkness that surrounds them. Yet while Eustacia and Wildeve take away from their experience much by way of emotion, they take away little by way of insight: the situation of neither changes, and we see them return, rather uneasily, to a spouse for Wildeve made less attractive by accessibility and to one for Eustacia incapacitated by physical infirmity.

Of course, the most striking and most important event in The Return of the Native, possibly in all of Hardy's fiction, is the closed door scene. The culmination of the causes set into play by chance meetings, lucky and unlucky, by renewed love attractions, and by midnight manoeverings, occurs on the thirty-first of August, when Mrs. Yeobright attempts a reconciliation with Clym and Eustacia by visiting them. The

causes are indeed multifarious, and the scene itself complex. All three major characters, Clym, Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright, exhibit the same lack of understanding and insight with which they begin. As Penelope Vigar notes, such scenes are depicted by Hardy with purposeful clarity:

> he selects or blurs the detail as it is relevant or irrelevant to his picture. By his altering of perspective and lighting, he can show the different visions of life mingling or in ironic tension with each other, so that the unexpected and dreamlike contrast vividly with the real and probable.[6]

In the closed door scene the different visions of life do indeed come into ironic tension with each other. Eustacia is jarringly presented with three conflicts in one: her romantic attachment to Wildeve, now revived, her relationship to Clym, now weakened; and her animosity toward Mrs. Yeobright, who presents herself at the door. And the conflicts seen from other points of view are no less stressful: Wildeve has at last found a method of presenting himself to Eustacia without fear of bodily harm from the reddleman, yet finds himself in an uncomfortable position at Mrs. Yeobright's knock. Mrs. Yeobright, too, finds her own expectations shockingly overturned. Yet it is not so much the technique of lighting (as Vigar would have us believe) in this scene that controls it; rather, it is Hardy's masterful control of differing perspectives which informs us of the "different visions of life." We see and experience the incident from each character's point of view (Clym's only later, however), thereby at once being, as J. Hillis Miller notes, "a cold observer, spatially detached, seeing without being seen, and yet at the same time able to share the feelings of the characters, see with their eyes, and hear with their ears."[7] The point of view and each person's degree of vision or blindness becomes necessarily part of

the meaning of Hardy's expression. Experiencing both the larger scene and the individual perspective saves the reader from cynical indifference on the one hand and from melodrama on the other. The reader's mind is harkened back to a similar distant yet personally profound experience in Hardy's own life: the shocking vision of the Dorchester execution from a vantage point on the heath some three miles away.

Hardy is ruefully precise in his description of the larger scene. Mrs. Yeobright follows Clym to his house, watches from the Devil's Bellows as Clym enters and Wildeve momentarily follows, then approaches the house herself, knocks, and is not admitted despite the appearance of Eustacia at the window. The scene has a distinctly static quality; as Ian Gregor points out, "when Mrs. Yeobright's knock comes it dramatically 'freezes' the scene, and for an instant the emotional complex of the Yeobrights and Wildeve is laid bare."[8] The house sitting in the sunlight is still; the only movement is in the air above on the Devil's Bellows. Each character is fatally caught in his or her own folly: Mrs. Yeobright in delaying her reconciliation with her son and daughter-in-law; Eustacia in her romantic attentions, Wildeve in his impulsive romanticism, and Clym in his self-absorption.

The moment is a turning point for each character: Mrs. Yeobright walks away, crushed and exhausted, to her death; Eustacia and Wildeve unwittingly embark on a course of events which lead them to death as well, and Clym is jarred from his self-centred existence to tragedy and a life of remorse. The experience follows each one as a haunting visual memory which cannot be shaken from the mind but which cannot be fully understood. Mrs. Yeobright turns from Clym's door, "within her two

sights were graven--that of Clym's hook and brambles at the door, and that of a woman's face at a window." (RN, Bk. 4, p. 305) The other woman, Eustacia, is plagued and tormented by her remorse over her inaction, and by what she has seen from the other side of the window: "the spectre of a worn-out woman knocking at a door which she would not open" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 329). Clym's disturbance is at first subconscious, yet terribly ironic, as he relates to Eustacia his dream about his mother, and gazes out of the very window from which Eustacia saw the elder woman standing at the door (RN, Bk. 4, p. 310). After Mrs. Yeobright's death, Clym struggles with his conscience, but is haunted by the guilt caused by Johnny Nunsuch's innocent re-telling of Mrs. Yeobright's last words: "there was housed in his memory a vivid picture of the face of a little boy as he entered the hovel where Clym's mother lay" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 339). Similarly, Wildeve's romantic attachment to Eustacia, and his sympathy for her agony over the affair is summed up in his vision of her as he some days later drives away from Clym's house with Thomasin:

> Wildeve lifted his eyes to the bedroom windows. Looking from one of them he could discern a pale, tragic face watching him drive away. It was Eustacia's.
>
> (RN, Bk. 4, p. 333)

Thus the experience of each participant is isolated in their minds, and the emotional power of the visual experience is strong.[9] The visual reminder is the emotional scar.

It is fitting that no single character has a full and complete view of the events of the thirty-first of August. Indeed, even the reader, who watches Mrs. Yeobright approach Clym's house, is unaware that there

is another watcher, the boy Johnny Nunsuch, who remains unrevealed for some three weeks in the novel's time span.

The scene itself is presented as a complex series of Chinese boxes: as the external observer, the reader sees Mrs. Yeobright watch Clym and Wildeve enter the house while she glimpses Eustacia looking back at her from within. Mrs. Yeobright knows the two men are inside with Eustacia, but does not know that Clym is sleeping; nor does she know Wildeve's identity or motives. Similarly, Eustacia sees Mrs. Yeobright but does not know her motives for being there nor her physical condition. Neither does she know, from her retreat in the other room, that Clym is not awakened by his mother's knocking. Wildeve knows that he is in an uncomfortable situation when Mrs. Yeobright knocks, but knows nothing of the extent of Eustacia's discomfort on seeing the elder woman (an animosity stemming partly from the quarrel between the two women). Clym, the centre "box," is asleep and knows nothing of what unfolds around him. Ironically, it is he who later unearths the previously unknown container of all the visual information, Johnny Nunsuch. Yet Johnny, who has as large a visual perspective as the reader, has the least knowledge of the event; it is to him truly a "confused heap of impressions" as much as to the other characters. Thus a full view of the facts has for Hardy little to do with the ability to acquire wisdom or insight.

The degrees of knowledge, insight, and involvement, therefore, are in the closed door scene closely intertwined with the degrees of visual information each character absorbs. But there is no direct correlation: the ability to "see from afar" does not necessarily denote an ability to comprehend; indeed, it usually produces confusion for those like

Mrs. Yeobright and Johnny. Here it is only the story-teller--and ultimately the reader--who can decipher the "confused heap of impressions" and find some sense of the complex forces of human folly and chance--Hardy's "dicing Time"[10] at work in our lives. That Clym, the holder of the least visual information, ultimately discovers Mrs. Yeobright's, and Johnny's visual "impressions," but arrives at the wrong conclusion as to Eustacia's involvement, reinforces Hardy's contention that visual experience is confusing and misleading. Mrs. Yeobright's information, her "impression" of the event, is passed from Johnny to Clym, from the larger Chinese boxes to the centre one. Her words are echoed by Johnny as he enters the hut moments after Mrs. Yeobright dies, when Clym's emotions are at a feverish peak:

> 'I've got something to tell 'ee, mother, 'he cried in a shrill tone. 'That woman asleep there walked along with me to-day; and she said I was to say that I had seed her, and she was a broken-hearted woman and cast off by her son . . . '
>
> (RN, Bk. 4, p. 323)

Those words, innocently spoken and painfully accurate, at first drive Clym into a ranting despair, then haunt him, as he constantly recalls "the round eyes, eager gaze, the piping voice which enunciated the words" and which "operated like stilettos on his brain" (RN, Bk. 4, p. 339).

In a desperate attempt to discover more about his mother's death and her feelings toward him, Clym returns to Johnny to extract what become the decisive facts in the breakdown of his marriage. But he errs in obtaining the visual facts only, behind which are the myriad of causes, motives, and conflicts that temper the visual information. He discovers, for example, from Diggory Venn that Mrs. Yeobright knocked at

his door in the hope of reconciliation; he learns from Johnny that another man was inside his house at the time and that Eustacia saw his mother but did not open the door. But to the causal factors of the event, and to Eustacia's full part in the episode, he is as blind intellectually as he is physically, having obtained the information from one who does not understand the meaning behind what he sees any more than does Clym.

Ironically, Clym actually recognizes, before speaking to Johnny, that the information he needs to solve his mystery will be beyond the boy's comprehension:

> To probe a child's mind after the lapse of six weeks, not for facts which the child had seen and understood, but to get at those which were in their nature beyond him, did not promise much; yet when every obvious channel is blocked we grope towards the small and obscure.
>
> (RN, Bk. 5, p. 339)

Yet once Clym hears only what the boy has "seen and understood," be ignores the possibility of the facts "which were in their nature beyond him," that is, he discovers the immediate causes for the change in his mother's thinking during those last hours, but not the deeper meanings. He does not know, nor does he attempt in any sincere way to discover, that his mother and Eustacia had argued over money lost, that Mrs. Yeobright had wrongly assumed that Eustacia had received the money from Wildeve, that Mrs. Yeobright had given those treasured family guineas into the hands of a "slack-twisted, slim-looking maphrotight fool" for delivery to her son (RN, Bk. 1, p. 53), that Wildeve was in the house at that time because of a justifiable fear of bodily harm from Diggory Venn

if he attempted a visit at night, that since their marriage Eustacia had actually been faithful, and that when his mother had knocked Eustacia had believed that he had gone to the door himself after muttering "mother" in his sleep. In short, he sees only the surface of the truth, just as he sees only the surface of life, and not the substance.

This self-deception, a stubborn refusal to see that events will fall where they must, is evident throughout the personalities of all major characters in The Return of the Native. A small point of comparison to this willful blindness and fantasy can be seen, however, in the figure of Thomasin. While she is scarcely the same foil to others' folly we have in Gabriel Oak, she does, however, exhibit a character whose vision is sharp, whose sense of purpose is keen, and who does not blind herself with imaginings. She is a bright spot in a brown world:

> The loft was lighted by a semicircular hole, through which the pigeons crept to their lodgings in the same high quarters of the premises; and from this hole the sun shone in a bright yellow patch upon the figure of the maiden as she knelt and plunged her naked arms into the soft brown fern, which, from its abundance, was used on Egdon in packing away stores of all kinds. . . . 'Dear Clym, I wonder how your face looks now?' she said, gazing abstractedly at the pigeon-hole, which admitted the sunlight so directly upon her brown hair and transparent tissues that it almost seemed to shine through her.
>
> (RN, Bk. 2, p. 136)

The fondness of the tone of that description and the image of Thomasin's figure framed and focused by the sunlight, so well reinforces our perception of her simple virtue that the reader can scarcely believe she is even perceived as a "lost" woman. She has strong feelings of regret for the failed attempt at marriage between herself and Wildeve, but she remains practical, wise, and pragmatic. "Why don't people judge me by

my acts? Now, look at me as I kneel here, picking up these apples--do I look like a lost woman? . . . I wish all good women were as good as I!" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 137). She marries Wildeve (although she makes clear "I don't believe in hearts at all" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 180), bears his child, and is the first to ensure good relations between herself and Mrs. Yeobright. While her efforts are ultimately without effect, it is no insignificant matter that it is Thomasin who aids in inducing Mrs. Yeobright to attempt reconciliation with Clym, Clym to attempt to bring Eustacia back, and who raises the alarm that something is gravely wrong on the second sixth of November.

Thomasin, however, does not succeed. Hardy wishes us to realize that vision cannot be given or loaned; it must come from within. Yet the external aids, the events of our lives, are there as "diverse readings of its phenomena," which are "forced upon us by chance and change." (CP, p. 84). Thomasin's "I don't believe in hearts" is a result of her "unadjusted impressions;" Eustacia's "I have tried and tried to be a splendid woman, and how destiny has been against me!", and Clym's "it was all my fault" are the result of theirs (RN, Bk. 5, p. 372, and Bk. 6, p. 421-22 respectively). It is easy to see whose lives remain a "confused heap of impressions."

Chapter Four

The Woodlanders

The Woodlanders was first published in book form in 1887, nine years after the publication of The Return of the Native; however, it is generally acknowledged that it was conceived and in part created in the 1870's.[1] This novel is therefore an excellent point for an examination of Hardy's visual techniques. In form, concept and overall pattern it is clearly related to the novels of the earlier decade.[2] The central perspective, the closeness between characters and narrator, narrator and reader which is found in Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure, and even The Mayor of Casterbridge is not adopted in The Woodlanders; rather, like many of the earlier novels, it focuses on a number of character responses to reality.

The characters, from Marty South to Giles, George Melbury, Grace, Fitzpiers, and Felice Charmond, form a continuum of sensibility and insight. Between Marty the eternal woodlander and Felice the unequivocal outsider the difference is clear: Marty wholly devotes herself to an inaccessible romantic ideal (Giles) and is left with a dream; Felice devotes herself to the attainment of ephemeral pleasures and is defeated (literally) by them. The gradations from the woodlander through to the outsider are difficult to discern, but it is the characters' responses to reality, to their visual impressions of experience, which define the differences. Giles is a romantic woodlander who cannot grasp the surface of reality, but who wishes for

some of its pleasures (marriage to Grace). George Melbury similarly has a child-like naivete which prevents him from seeing clearly the surfaces which so impress him (his daughter's education and Fitzpiers' social standing, for example). Grace is the mid-point, the person who reflects the very "Hardyan division between sophistication and rustic simplicity"[3] but who eventually rejects the latter for the former. Fitzpiers is an outsider who, while not wholly villainous, is still almost completely motivated by surfaces, by appearances and, like Sargeant Troy, by what the present moment offers him. Felice is, of course, the final extension of this continuum. The subtle interplay between and among characters emphasizes the differences as well as the connections. Marty's only surface attraction, her hair, finds its way to the head of Felice Charmond who is eventually mocked by Fitzpiers for this deception; Fitzpiers' ignorance of John South's fear of the old tree results in medical advice which indirectly ruins Giles as well as Marty; and George and Grace Melbury have associations with them all, drawn by the attractions of a higher social class but drawn as well to the rustic simplicity by nature.

The difference, then, between those who see the inner heart of things and none of its surfaces, and those who see the surfaces and not the heart, becomes part of the expression of The Woodlanders. In this chapter I will show how insight and moral blindness is expressed as a function both of character and situation, or environment. In Under the Greenwood Tree and even Far From the Madding Crowd lack of insight was expressed as an idiopathic, personal phenomenon; in The Return of the Native the environment, the ever-present heath, acted on its players more as a metaphor of universal indifference. The Woodlanders brings

the environment directly into the realm of the "conjuring show" itself: Little Hintock and its environs helps shape the characters' previous development and reveals another facet of the source of their deficiencies. Those who are inextricably linked to the isolated simplicity of the woodlands are defeated by those who can see the surfaces and have the power to change their environment; those who come from the outside are blind to the intricacies of the inner hearts of others and are often defeated by their very obtuseness; and those who attempt to tread the fine line between the two are confused and isolated from both sides. There are tantalizing yet tell-tale signs along the way in this novel which tell us at times that it is, or perhaps should be, easy to read the truth behind the nature of things, but more often they tell us it is impossible to do so. It is important to examine these signs, this back-drop to reality, before examining the relation of the players to that back-drop.

The scene is set initially by the people in Mrs. Dollery's van, whose private conversations are public:

> Looking at the van from the back the spectator could . . . see, through its interior, a square piece of the same sky and landscape that he saw without, but intruded on by the profiles of the seated passengers, who, as they rumbled onward, their lips moving and heads nodding in animated private converse, remained in cheerful unconsciousness that their mannerisms and facial peculiarities were sharply defined to the public eye.
>
> (W, Ch. i, p. 37)

The frame of the window, separating the spectator from the passenger yet opening the passenger's "private converse" to public view, and the uniqueness of the individual perspective--these are motifs which will

repeat themselves in The Woodlanders. The owners of many houses in Hintock, for example, leave their windows without curtains, on the premise that "very few people except themselves passed this way after dark" (W, Ch. i, p. 38). It is this openness which enables Barber Percombe to locate Marty. Private life is open as a spectacle for public scrutiny. Indeed, Hardy seems to reinforce this idea by describing Marty's face as having "the usual fullness of expression which is developed by a life of solitude . . . in the still water of privacy every feeling and sentiment unfolds in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder" (W, Ch. ii, p. 41). The isolated Hintock, then, by its very nature, unfolds its heart and leaves it open.

It has been noted that such statements establish "the notion of a communion without words as a fundamental presupposition of the novel."[4] Yet Hardy takes great pains to warn us by numerous statements that it is not easy to see what another is thinking or feeling. As a geographic location, Hintock may be isolated from the "eyes of the multitude" (W, ch. ii, p. 41), but it is also isolated from the revealing rays of the sun. "Except at midday the sun was not seen complete by the Hintock people, but rather in the form of numerous little stars staring through the leaves" (W, Ch. xx, p. 174). The constant darkness, or shade, is another symbol for the "wandering and unconsciously deluded human characters."[5] Indeed, the place itself defines the sensibilities of its natives:

> It was one of those sequestered spots outside the gates of the world where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more listlessness than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premisses, and results in inferences wildly

> imaginative; yet where, from time to time, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely-knit interdependence of the lives therein.
>
> (W, Ch. i, p. 38)

The life of Little Hintock may be in some ways obvious and transparent, but in essence it is difficult to understand. Even the rumor of the affair between Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond is not open to scrutiny: the people are subjected to half truths and half-seen things: "Tantalizing phenomena, at once showing and concealing the real relationships of the persons concerned, created a diffusion of excited surprise" (W, Ch. xxxi, p. 253).

The remoteness of Little Hintock, then, creates an environment that affects the sensibilities of its people rather than merely serving as an indifferent universe, as was the case with Egdon Heath. Hintock creates an openness (the easy view of the passengers of Mrs. Dollery's van, or the transparency of Marty's face, for example); yet simultaneously conceals (in its overgrown darkness and the half-seen affair between Fitzpiers and Felice). The openness is translated in the natives as naivete and simplicity, and the concealment in their very obtuseness to the visible phenomena of society.

Marty South, of course, is the prime example of the child-like simplicity of Hintock. She can survive within the woodlands in a way which Felice Charmond and even Grace cannot (she takes up her father's spar-making easily and lends an expert hand to the tree-barking); but the workings of the social order are beyond her, unseen. Our first description of Marty reveals this vulnerability:

> Her face had the usual fulness of expression which is developed by a life of solitude. Where the eyes of a multitude continuously beat like waves upon a countenance they seem to wear away its mobile power; but in the still water of privacy every feeling and sentiment unfolds in visible luxuriance, to be interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder.
>
> (W, Ch. ii, p. 41)

While on the surface this description may seem to romanticize the natives of the woodlanders (the terms "fulness of expression" and "visible luxuriance"), I would suggest that this openness indicates a vulnerability to the outside world. Indeed, that Marty's face can be "interpreted as readily as a printed word by an intruder" is confirmed by Barber Percombe's ready conclusion that Marty will not sell her hair because she wishes to be attractive to a man.

Marty's "feeling and sentiment" are, as Barber Percombe divines, directed towards Giles Winterborne. This romantic attachment is followed by an almost immediate denial: following her interview with the hair-cutter and a long night's work Marty overhears George Melbury tell his wife of the arranged engagement between the man Marty loves and Melbury's daughter Grace. Once she learns "the secret of it all" she is willing, despite the surface fact that Melbury admits he does not wish the marriage, to renounce her desire. She unmercifully cuts her own hair, for which the barber had left two gold sovereigns in exchange, thereby sacrificing her one pretension to physical beauty.

From this point Marty is portrayed as one who, while firmly associated with the woodlands and its deeper realities, is completely outside the social orbit even of Hintock itself. She declines to take part with the other girls in the Midsummer-eve's antics; she is heard by

Grace and Fitzpiers as a disembodied voice saying of two singed birds rising from the fire in the woods, "That is the end of what is called love" (W, Ch. xix, p. 173). And her isolation and romanticism are clearly confirmed in the novel's end, where she is seen alone in the dark, Grace having deserted Giles by returning to Fitzpiers.

She is, it seems, happier at this last moment than at any other point in the novel. She is alone with the memory of Giles, unencumbered by the presence of others or even of the man himself who never returned her love:

> 'Now, my own, own love,' she whispered, 'you are mine, and only mine; for she 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 again.
>
> (W, Ch. xlviii, p. 393)

Marty's soliliquy confirms her position as the "woodland" end of the continuum of characters. She is from first to last removed even from the social order of Little Hintock, firmly attached to the deeper, romantic realities of her life. Neither does the social order appear to her as a confused heap of impressions; rather, it is invisible (in her sighting of the pheasants at the fire in the woods, she misses the presence of other people, Fitzpiers and Grace). Her characterization is neither pathetic nor tragic. Indeed, as Dale Kramer notes:

> She incarnates the strength of Hardy's peasant stock, who feel deeply but quietly, accepting stoically whatever fate gives them. But since she never experiences even the possibility of choice, she cannot perform calamitous and willful error.[6]

Marty's rustic simplicity also comments upon the error of the next

woodlander, Giles Winterborne. Like Marty, Giles feels deeply and quietly, and has a certain stoic acceptance of his fate. He is, however, conscious of the social world above him, and attempts to deal with it. His character is strong, but he is doomed because he cannot comprehend the surfaces of reality; and his simplicity and incomrehension make him truly "a bewildered child at a conjuring show."

Giles is a man who knows his own heart and can live with his rugged existence, but he knows little of the surfaces of the world around him. He is completely in harmony with his natural world--he is endowed with "a gentle conjurer's touch" in tree-planting--but he is woefully unperceiving of the social one. This deficiency, and the passivity it is coupled with, is noted by Richard Hannaford, who writes that Giles "lacks that finer sensibility given to the imaginative which allows them perception into human character and motivation."[7] Indeed, to many signs of humanity and social contact Giles exhibits a blindness which is his most glaring fault, and which is his most obvious reason for failure. On his visit to Sherton Abbas to meet Grace on her arrival from school, for example, he sees the aspect of the town:

> He . . . drove on ahead into the streets; the churches, the abbey, and other mediaeval buildings on this clear bright morning having the linear distinctness of architectural drawings, as if the original dream and vision of the conceiving master-mason were for a brief hour flashed down through the centuries to an unappreciative age. Giles saw their eloquent look on this day of transparency, but could not construe it.
>
> (W, Ch. V, p. 66)

Hardy provides a clear contrast here between the obvious clarity of the association with the vision of the master-mason centuries before and the

"linear distinctness" of the buildings that day. Moreover, he gives Giles perception enough to notice their "eloquent look," but shows that Giles' vision stops there: he cannot make the association. He is not capable. The addition of the phrase "on this day of transparency" both implies that the association is clear; nothing should hinder one's appreciation of the "vision of the master-mason," and comments upon the day's events in Giles' life. The vision of the master-mason is clear, and so is the fact that Giles should have paid more attention to the way his external appearance will strike Grace. Grace's basic difference from him and from the girl she used to be is clear, as well as her basic inaccessibility. But he misses--just--on every point. The pains Hardy has taken in the short time of relating the day's events of this first meeting set the tone for the entire novel, and do much to establish Giles' characterization. As we shall see later, he is not a wood-god; he is a man with blinders which cause him as much grief as the failure of vision causes any other character. Indeed, he knows his heart but is unable to discern its intricacies: that same morning, as he drives to Sherton Abbas, he does so "without elation and without discomposure:"

> Had he regarded his inner self spectacularly, as lovers are now daily more wont do do, he might have felt pride in the discernment of a somewhat rare power in him--that of keeping not only judgment but emotion suspended in difficult cases. But he noted it not.
>
> (W, Ch. v, p. 65; italics added.)

Again, the association between the real and the visible is there: "had he regarded his inner self spectacularly" he would have recognized his inner strength. He does possess the rare power of keeping his judgement and emotion suspended in difficult cases, but he does not recognize that

power. Hardy clearly wishes us to realize that, while Giles has the potential for full insight into his life, that potential remains untapped. It is a common method of Hardy's to show this human condition: he gives his characters the tools for success, the capabilities of insight and vision, but he also shows how those tools remain unused because the characters do not recognize the tools, the signs, or the sights. They cannot connect their "confused heap of impressions" into meaning.

Winterborne is completely at home in his natural woodland environment, but he is most often seen reacting to the social problems which pressure him to lose his beloved and his house. And these are problems which he neither fully appreciates nor understands, despite the fact that the tools for understanding are within his grasp. On first recognizing Grace's reserve in response to his rough appearance at their meeting he momentarily realizes his folly:

> It had sometimes dimly occurred to him, in his ruminating silences at Little Hintock, that external phenomena--such as the lowness or height or colour of a hat, the fold of a coat, the make of a boot, or the chance attitude of a limb at the instant of view--may have a great influence upon feminine opinion of a man's worth, so frequently founded on non-essentials; but a certain causticity of mental tone towards himself and the world in general had prevented to-day, as always, any enthusiastic action on the strength of that reflection; and her momentary instinct of reserve at first sight of him was the penalty he paid for his laxness.
>
> (W, Ch. v, p. 68)

The environment in which Giles lives necessarily makes the "external phenomena" of appearance extraneous; they are "non-essentials." Yet to impress or even attract the woman who has been sophisticated to the point where appearance is important, Giles would have had to overcome

his natural bent. He does realize, or at least it has "dimly occurred to him," that the external visible self is often the basis for another's judgement of worth. But "a certain causticity of mental tone" prevents action. This passivity, and the dimness of understanding of any other point of view than his own, will ultimately destroy him.

That Giles is too rigidly connected to his own perspective, and therefore blind to surface realities, is emphasized at his Christmas party and at the auction the day following Grace's return. He blunders at the auction in the woods, embarrassing Grace and annoying her father because his romantic rapture over snowflakes falling on Grace's hair makes him blind to the reality of "whether he had bought faggots, poles, or log-wood" (W, Ch. vii, p. 85). Giles' distorted vision of reality, or perhaps, rather, his lack of insight, is reiterated in his erroneous anticipation of the Christmas party: having invited all sorts of people, he sees too late that Grace is completely out of place and that the loud and unruly dominate the scene. "In his mind's eye, before the event, they had been the mere background or padding of the scene; but somehow in the reality they were the most prominent personages there" (W, Ch. x, p. 106). The jarring awareness of the inadequacy of reality versus the expectations of the imagination, combines to embarrass Giles, but his naivete makes the revelations no more than a "confused heap of impressions."

The Christmas party fails, not so much because it is the wrong affair (which it is), but also due to his own backwardness. His off-hand invitation to Melbury results in the honoured guests arriving several hours too early, and his servants' manner of cleaning, polishing, and serving are almost offensive to the refined tastes of

Grace--they are certainly offensive to the tastes of her father. His real error, though, is in not foreseeing the actual events accurately:

> Giles himself, since the untoward beginning of the feast, had not quite liked to see Grace present. He wished he had not asked such people as Cawtree and the hollow-turner. He had done it, in dearth of other friends, that the room might not appear empty. In his mind's eye, before the event, they had been the mere background or padding of the scene; but somehow in the reality they were the most prominent personages there.
>
> (W, Ch. x, p. 106)

His party has turned from a tasteful celebration surrounding the renewed affection between himself and Grace to a rowdy country "randyvoo" in which his guest of honour is completely out of place. Again, his error is expressed in visual terms: the offensive guests were to have been "background or padding of the scene" in Giles' imagination, with Grace, supposedly, occupying the spotlight. That the reality is quite opposite to Giles' imagination, and that Melbury attributes Grace's aborted friendship with Felice Charmond to her presence at this assembly, turns the tide well against Winterborne.

Giles makes another attempt; he offers the horse, Darling. Despite the fact that his action "upon the whole strengthed his position," at least with Grace, the scene offers up more evidence of Giles' lack of insight, his blindness to the social world. He appears at the Melburys' home as a figure which darkens their window (W, Ch. xi, p. 113), interrupting their morning meal. He imposes his presence upon the household until Grace's, "I have to go and help my mother now, Mr. Winterborne," brings his eyes "suddenly upon her" and forces his realization that he is out of tune with the social world, and with his fellow humans in general. This realization is again expressed in visual

terms:

> On their faces, as they regarded Giles, were written their suspended thoughts and compound feelings concerning him, could he have read them through those old panes. But he saw nothing: his features just now were, for a wonder, lit up with a red smile at some other idea.
>
> (W, Ch. vi, p. 113)

The "compound feelings" are, of course, Melbury's belief that in promising Grace to Giles he is "ruining her for conscience sake;" and Grace's "involuntary" kind regard for him. He sees nothing because he is infused with a belief in the appropriateness of his gift, and devoid of an understanding of the motivations of those watching him at that moment.

For all his rigidity, Giles loves Grace dearly. But he consents to watch her from afar for the most part, making very few active moves to woo her when Fitzpiers pursues her so expertly.[8] This passive watching, coupled with his very dim recognition of the social element, establishes a distance between the two which is never closed and an isolation of Giles which is never mended.

It is through windows, which at once separate and draw closer, that the distance is symbolized to a bewildered Winterborne. It is through a window that Giles sees Grace on the eve of her visit to Hintock House (W, Ch. iii, p. 86-87). It is an opened window that reveals Giles' knowledge of Grace's identity to the curious Fitzpiers (W, Ch. xvli, p. 148). It is through a window that he chastizes Grace for hailing him when she returns from her wedding journey (W, Ch. xxv, p. 207). It is a vision of her through another window that causes him to linger over thoughts of her when Fitzpiers is first hailed to Hintock House (W, Ch.

xxvi, p. 216). And it is through the lattice of his window at One-Chimney Hut that he last communicates with Grace (W, Ch. xli, p. 334). These windows, tantalizing in their transparency, vexatious in their physical existence, sum up the conflicts within Giles and his basic sensibility. Grace is unattainable (she is separated from him physically and socially); yet she is the object of his love and respect (the window shuts out all extraneous information, focusing on Grace as Giles watches below). Unfortunately for him Giles never assimilates the visual messages he receives; he merely gazes at his loved one in honest hope at times and in frustration at other times.

Shortly after Grace's arrival in Hintock, for example, Giles approaches her home with the purpose of paying a visit. Her mind and mood, however, are focused on an antithesis to Giles, on Felice Charmond, mistress of Hintock House:

> On drawing near the gate his attention was attracted by the sight of one of the bedrooms blinking into a state of illumination. In it stood Grace lighting several candles, her right hand elevating the taper, her left hand on her bosom, her face thoughtfully fixed on each wick as it kindled, as if she saw in every flame's growth the rise of a life to maturity.
>
> (W, Ch. vii, p. 86)

Giles' association between her thoughtful look and the idea that "she saw in every flame's growth the rise of a life to maturity" is an accurate one; indeed, Grace is at that moment ruminating on the possibilities of a friendship with the great lady. The scene places Grace as far from Giles as she will ever be, in a different social sphere as well as in a different sphere of sensibilities. He recognizes this dissociation, yet in a way cherishes it as he looks upon Grace as some-

thing above him, an impression or vision of a woman rather than flesh like his own.

Giles does not see Grace inside the house on that visit, and receives a rather forced promise from her father who says "she's yours, Giles, as far as I'm concerned." On leaving the house, Giles again sees, through her window, what is supposedly "his":

> Grace, surrounded by a sufficient number of candles to answer all purposes of self-criticism, was standing before a cheval glass that her father had lately bought expressly for her use; she was bonneted, cloaked, and gloved, and glanced over her shoulder into the mirror, estimating her aspect. Her face was lit with the natural elation of a young girl hoping to inaugurate on the morrow an intimate acquaintance with a new, interesting, and influential friend.
>
> (W, Ch. vii, p. 87)

This second "framed" scene also echoes, in Grace's "estimating her aspect" over her shoulder, a deficiency in Giles we have seen before. Here Grace takes pains to view herself from a different angle, from the angle of the new, influential friend. It is just Giles' inability to do this--to see himself from a different perspective at an "instant of view"--which accounts for his rough appearance and her initial reserve at their first reunion. That their sensibilities are so separated, and that his presence in her house is not even enough to bring her downstairs, bespeaks a relationship which is neither fruitful nor "symbolic of future bloom and growth."[9]

Thus Giles exhibits a remarkable lack of comprehension in his life,[10] and a passivity which will destroy him. He acquiesces to Grace's rejection at South's tree by removing himself farther and farther from her view into "that gloomy Niflheim or fogland which

involved him" despite the probabilities "that something might have been done by the appearance of Winterborne on the ground beside Grace" (W, Ch. xiii, p. 126). In the final analysis he adheres to a strict moral code by not saving himself and sleeping in One-chimney Hut with the willing Grace. His only real act of rebellion--save reaching out "with the abstraction of a somnambulist" to touch a flower on Grace's dress--is to break down and kiss her passionately, knowing full well she belongs to another man. And for both actions he harbours almost unbearable guilt.

Giles' last act, giving up his cottage for Grace, is his most real and effective declaration of love, and it is what brings Grace's love for him into the open, to a point where she is willing to share her bed with him. Yet these scenes dramatize that Giles remains as passive and unperceiving in his last days as he was when we first encountered him. Again he misses what he sees, and lets the latticed window stand between himself and Grace. Furthermore it is his own act--that of locking Grace in his hut and locking himself out--that finally separates them and ensures his death. As he was when Grace first returned to Hintock, he is on the morning after she arrives at his cottage, content to see her from afar:

> At seven o'clock he tapped at her window as he had promised, retreating at once that she might not catch sight of him. But from his shelter under the boughs he could see her very well, when, in response to his signal, she opened the window and the light fell upon her face. The languid largeness of her eyes showed that her sleep had been little more than his own, and the pinkness of their lids that her waking hours had not been free from tears.
>
> (W, Ch. xii, p. 332)

As in his earlier sights of her through the windows of her father's home, Giles sees his love in the "frame" of the window: all extraneous visual information is unseen; only her and her eyes have meaning for Giles because through them he feels a communion with her. But this romantic feeling of communion does nothing to bring them closer. Admire her from afar he does easily; defile her by taking her physically he will not.

Giles' way of seeing also dramatizes that his deep love for Grace borders on worship and dramatizes his naivete about the social order. Indeed, he dies (not unlike Mrs. Yeobright) with an incomplete vision of his loved one, never knowing that Grace finds him in his rough shelter, guides him back to his hut, and sacrifices her safety from discovery by calling her estranged husband for medical aid. In his dying hours Giles does not recognize her, and seems "to look upon her as some angel or other supernatural creature of the visionary world in which he was mentally living" (W, Ch. xiii, p. 341). Looking back on previous events, can we say that Giles has ever viewed Grace differently? On the evening of her arrival in Hintock, for example, Giles watches her through the door of her parents' home; her aspect from his point of view is almost divine:

> The fire was as before the only light, and it irradiated Grace's face and hands so as to make them look wondrously smooth and fair beside those of the two elders; shining also through the loose hair about her temples as sunlight through a brake.
>
> (W, Ch. vi, p. 76)

The choice of the term "irradiated"--itself almost a suggestion of light shining from within--and the precise visual scene of the glow around

Grace's face, hands and hair are easily suggestive of a divine creature, at least in the eyes of the watcher. One recalls Eustacia Vye's first glimpse of Clym Yeobright as "two feet in Rembrandt's intensest manner." The face of that returned native, we are told, revealed "the deity that lies ignomiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase" which "shone out of him like a ray" (RN, Bk. 2, p. 163). Giles' romantic, unreal attraction to Grace is actually repeated in his last hours:

> He never for a moment recognized her, continuing his rapid conversation to himself and seeming to look upon her as some angel or other supernatural creature of the visionary world in which he was mentally living.
>
> (W, Ch. xiii, p. 341)

Thus he dies with much the same lack of insight into his own situation, the social sphere, and his loved one as he began. Indeed, his death is perhaps as much a reflection of his failure to assimilate his experience of reality as it is a re-integration of a woodland sensibility to its original home.[11] Giles does, it must be admitted, see her "heart symptoms like books of large type" (W, Ch. xii, p. 334), but through his own "causticity of mental tone" and the unfortunate turn of events he never wins Grace. His vision is limited; his lack of understanding is fatal. His acquiescence to the decrees of a dimly understood social order, and an undue reverence for Grace (both expressed in visual terms), prevent him from acting at crucial points; those same traits prevent him from sharing his bed with Grace. And the reader's knowledge of the real Grace Melbury, a being as erring in her ways as Winterborne is in his, only serves to heighten the sense of irony and pathos at his end.

The informing attitude of Grace Melbury is confusion: as Dale Kramer notes, she "contains within herself the Hardyan division between sophistication and rustic simplicity."[12] In many ways she enjoys her past as the "raw country girl" and, like Giles, is motivated by a desire for romance and the deep affections of others. But her sophistication--acquired outside the bounds of Hintock--allow Giles' rustic appearance to offend her refined tastes, and she only comes to a complete awareness of his worth after he is dead. This blindness to Giles' inner virtues, a listless acceptance of her father's socially ambitious energies, and her acceptance of a man whose "external phenomena" are as attractive as Giles' are unattractive, lead her to make decisions which she will regret bitterly.

Like Clym Yeobright, Grace Melbury is shown clearly to have the potential for right action, for governing her life as the wise and thoughtful mistress of her actions. But she fails to achieve wisdom due to a psychological blindness to the truth beneath the surface of things, and an acquiescence to the energies directing the surface affairs. She develops morally, emotionally, and intellectually more than any other character,[13] but her ambiguous end suggests that real insight into the forces governing her life is beyond her.

The potential Grace possesses, and the complex sensibility within her, are carefully dramatized in a visual context in our first meeting with her. Like Little Hintock itself, Grace holds within her the juxtaposition of the obvious and the visible and the concealed and invisible. Hardy warns us, that from "the highest point of view, to precisely describe a human being, the focus of a universe, how impossible!" (W, Ch. v, p. 69). The woman, we are told, is beneath

what is visible in a "cursory view":

> What people therefore saw of her in a cursory view was very little; in truth, mainly something that was not she. The woman herself was a conjectural creature who had little to do with the outlines presented to Sherton eyes; a shape in the gloom, whose true quality could only be approximated by putting together a movement now and a glance then, in that patient attention which nothing but watchful loving-kindness ever troubles itself to give.
>
> (W, Ch. v, p. 69)

We are invited, nay urged, in this short description to be aware of the "outlines presented," to be aware that they influence others, but also to exercize that "watchful loving-kindness" which leads to the truth.

In her very aspect, then, Grace embodies the main conflict of her life, the conflict between the visible and the real. Indeed, Grace's gravest mistakes are in acting upon the visible as though it were the real. She arrives at her old home with a degree of cultivated reserve at the "good old Hintock ways." The reserve is encouraged by her father's wish to rise above their social station in her associations with Felice Charmond, then Edred Fitzpiers, and by his desire to avoid the 'country boy' Giles Winterborne.

Grace's reserve at her intended lover Giles is indeed based upon the external phenomena of his appearance, his dress and his occupation. However, while she perceives that Giles is not the sum total of his appearances--she herself reproaches her father silently for cruelly noting the rough lifestyle of Winterborne (W, Ch. xi, p. 112)--she does little to act against it. A certain moral lassitude is hinted even in our first meeting with her. "Her look expressed a tendency to wait for others' thoughts before uttering her own; possibly also to wait for

other's deeds before her own doings" (W, Ch. v, p. 69).

Yet just as she allows herself to be swayed against Giles, on bases which she knows are wrong, she allows the same external phenomena to influence her attraction to Fitzpiers. Her initial awareness and curiosity about Fitzpiers' existence is based on the blinding light from his house on the hill which she notices on her first night home. That her curiosity fails with the light of day foreshadows her later awareness through marriage of "how much that was humanly not great could co-exist with attainments of an exceptional order" (W, Ch. xxx, p. 249). That realization, though, is a long time in coming, and her first thoughts of the strange alchemist-surgeon are a fascination which, unfortunately, will not die soon enough.

"Anything," J. Hillis Miller notes, " which is a true or false sign of the existence of another may be a means of entering the lover into fascinated longing."[14] In Grace's situation the fascination is based again on the physical, visible evidence of a refined, cultivated man living within the environs of her humble home. And nowhere is this feeling expressed as dramatically as in their first meeting in the surgeon's house, the surgeon sleeping while Grace is accidentally ushered into the room:

> The windows of Fitzpiers's soul being at present shuttered he probably appeared less impressive than in his hours of animation; but the light abstracted from his material features by sleep was more than counterbalanced by the mysterious influence of that state, in a stranger, upon the consciousness of a beholder so sensitive. So far as she could criticize at all she became aware that she had encountered a specimen of creation altogether unusual in that locality.
>
> (W, Ch. xviii, p. 157)

If he is not a creature from a supernatural world, he has the attraction of being a creature from outside the Hintock world; moreover, he is of a "stamp" of men much more refined than any she has previously encountered.

On seeing in his mirror that "the eyes of the reflected image were open gazing wonderingly at her," she experiences an "undescribable thrill" and becomes "as if spell-bound." The frame of the mirror, the reflected image, the sleeping stranger--these are almost the ingredients of a fairy tale. Grace's attraction to the interesting Fitzpiers at this moment strengthens into a strange magnetism. However, the mirror has no depth; it is itself a surface to reflect surfaces. That Grace's romantic sensibility is awakened by this superficial impression confirms her vulnerability and her error. Like the woodlanders she has deep feelings; but like the sophisticated outsiders she is impressed by surfaces. The combination makes her vulnerable to Fitzpiers' advances, which are considerably less sincere than she believes.

Fitzpiers' quality as the attractive alien lover is reinforced in Grace's mind throughout their next meetings. Some time after the first meeting, for example, Grace comes upon him when she returns to the woods to search for her lost purse (appropriately given her by Winterborne):

> She approached the heap of ashes, and acting upon what was suggested by a still shining ember or two she took a stick and stirred the heap, which thereupon burst into a flame. On looking around by the light thus obtained she for the first time saw the illumined face of Fitzpiers precisely in the spot where she had left him.
>
> (W, Ch. xix, p. 171)

This is the second time she has caught an unexpected, sudden sight of

the surgeon. In his house she had been alarmed at seeing the man sleeping on his couch; in the woods she finds him, suddenly illuminated by the fire she has rekindled (the latter experience having an effect not unlike Giles' views of Grace from her window, illuminated by the light of candles in her bedroom). The unreal scene is made even more so by the accident of the two birds tumbling into the ashes at their feet, and the unseen voice (Marty's) noting "the end of what is called love" (W, Ch. xix, p. 173). The birds, the unexpectedness of the scene, the "frame" of darkness surrounding an illuminated Fitzpiers--these elements focus upon the person beginning to influence her life. And yet she has only seen his surface.

Grace is affected, then, by what appears before her as visible essence: Giles' roughness, Fitzpiers' attractiveness, even Mrs. Charmond's Hintock House and the lady herself. The sense of irony in Grace's errors lies in our awareness from seeing Grace herself that it is impossible to discover truth from a "cursory view."

What moral development Grace achieves is dramatized by scenes and ideas highly charged with visual information. Her awakening to the realities of her life is expressed as a sharpened vision, and the scenes placed before her are framed and visually precise; they dramatize the conflicts of her life and (momentarily) shed light on her confusion. Indeed, Grace's moral maturation is based upon the recording of her "diverse readings" of life's phenomena. After she has seen signs of her husband's infidelity, Hardy reminds us that "her husband's character . . . shaped itself under the touch of time" (W, Ch. xxix, p. 239). The "shaping" of Fitzpiers' character, and the shaping of her own opinions are forced upon her consciousness as visual experiences; they are

"unadjusted impressions." Even before she has any reason to suspect Fitzpiers' fidelity she gains an awareness that her vision is flawed in some way. After they quarrel over Grace's wish to be married in church, she again recognizes that she has seen her future husband in an unreal light:

> As he receded and was clasped out of sight by the filmy shades he impressed Grace as a man who hardly appertained to her existence at all. Cleverer, greater than herself, one outside her mental orbit, as she considered him, he seemed to be her ruler rather than her equal, protector, and dear familiar friend.
>
> (W, Ch. xxiv, p. 196)

This impression is true to a large measure. The psychological and even social distance between them, established in their first view of each other in Fitzpiers' mirror, has not been narrowed: he is "outside her mental orbit." His surface attractiveness at this point conflicts with her very romantic--and naive--desire for an "equal, protector, and dear familiar friend."

Following this realization is a visual revelation which confirms this distance as well as his unworthiness as a future husband. The next morning she sees Suke Damson leave the front door of Fitzpiers' house in her night-dress. The scene without is framed by Grace's window, and Hardy takes pains to include every visual and emotional detail of the background scene:

> The tree-trunks, the road, the out-buildings, the garden, every object, wore that aspect of mesmeric passivity which the quietude of daybreak lends to such scenes. Helpless immobility seemed to be combined with intense consciousness; a meditative inertness possessed all things, oppressively contrasting with her own active emotions.
>
> (W, Ch. xxiv, p. 196)

The telescoping clarity of the scene she witnesses confirms the "intense consciousness" of the still morning, while her distance from the scene (Fitzpiers' house is "beyond the road . . . over the apple trees behind, high up the slope"), the fact of her crucial timing in waking and looking out, and her own "helpless immobility" reflect the scene outside. Indeed, here it is the very openness of the Hintock environs which reveal a truth to her, just as the passengers of Mrs. Dollery's van are open to public scrutiny through the window of the carriage.

The action Grace witnesses is as disturbing to her as another scene was to the young Hardy who witnessed a Dorchester execution through his telescope. The suddenness of the sight, paradoxically far away yet excruciatingly near, powerfully moving--these elements comprise Grace's first sign that her husband is one thing on the surface, another in substance:

> Something broke the stillness. The front-door of the house she was gazing at opened softly, and there came out into the porch a female figure, wrapped in a large cloak, beneath which was visible the white skirt of a long garment like a night-dress. A grey arm, stretching from within the porch, adjusted the cloak over the woman's shoulders; it was withdrawn and disappeared, the door closing behind her.
>
> (W, Ch. xxiv, p. 196-98)

To Grace there is a sickening association between that "grey arm" and the dressing-gown Fitzpiers wore at their first meeting. She falls into a reverie, again returning to that "mesmeric passivity" the morning wears and into which she will lapse again in her life. Yet the scene is one of very few in her life which prod her into active rebellion against the forces governing her. She is ready, before hearing her father's argument, to break off her engagement and return to Giles.

Despite Fitzpiers' ingenious handling of her implied accusation, the experience is enough to give her "little carking anxieties" about their coming marriage; her doubts indicate a certain maturation within the young girl. She recognizes her compromise in marrying the imperfect man by recognizing the inadequacy of the real to live up to the expectations of the imagination. The irony is dramatized with visual information similar to Winterborne's recognition that he was uncomfortable with Grace's experience at his Christmas party. The conflict between imagined and real is expressed as past anticipation and present fact:

> What an attenuation this cold pride was of the dream of her youth, in which she had pictured herself walking in state towards the altar, flushed by the purple light and bloom of her own passion. . . . Everything had been clear then, in imagination; now something was undefined.
>
> (W, Ch. xxiv, pp. 202-3)

A romantic picture, clear in imagination, is again unfulfilled in reality. That a certain degree of her motivation in marrying Fitzpiers was engendered by this romantic image is certainly true. Also influencing Grace is the person himself, the smooth, cultivated surgeon from a family of well respected antiquity, if not wealth. Thus she enters the marriage having acted upon the appearance rather than the substance of reality. And she pays for it dearly by aligning her fortunes with a man she will neither trust nor respect, but of whom she will be unable to rid herself.

The awareness of Fitzpiers' unworthiness is juxtaposed later with the figure of Winterborne as "autumn's very brother." The vast differences between Giles and Fitzpiers are dramatized before Grace's eyes in a visual display of contrasts. Fitzpiers recedes into the distance, the

emotional chasm between them symbolized by the physical one, Fitzpiers' barren insensitivity symbolized by the dead chalk ridge over which he rides. Out of the same picture rises Giles, tanned and smelling of the fruit on which his trade depends. As Jean Brooks notes, every "detail of colour, movement, gesture and speech in the chapter contribute to a pattern of association that opposes the vitality of a controlled relationship with nature's fertility to its abuse in Fitzpiers' infatuation."[15]

Yet Grace rejects the tenderness Giles offers and denies the validity of her renewed awareness by repulsing his instinctive advance:

> Her abandonment to the seductive hour and scene after her sense of ill-usage, her revolt for the nonce against social law, her passionate desire for primitive life may have showed in her face. Winterborne was looking at her, his eyes lingering on a flower that she wore in her bosom. Almost with the abstraction of a somnambulist he stretched out his hand and gently caressed the flower.
>
> She drew back. 'What are you doing, Giles Winterborne?' she exclaimed, with severe surprise.
>
> (W, Ch. xxviii, p. 236-7)

The immediate and uncompromising revoking of the marvellous scene preceeding this exchange emphasizes the basic error of Grace's vision. The attraction to Giles is one which has no association with the social world, and thus she denies the insight to her real desires by adhering to the surface truths of her existence, her marriage.

Grace will later flee from Fitzpiers to Giles but again refuse to break her marriage vow. Another moment of decisive crisis, in which she calls to Giles that "I don't mind what they say or what they think of us any more" (W, Ch. xli, p. 337) is followed by a full twenty-four hours of waiting in the hut for fear that "some stray passenger or woodman

should encounter her in such a reconnoitre" (p. 338). It is plain that she does care what others think of her.

Her eventual return to Fitzpiers shows a dubious maturity. She recognizes that her husband has changed, and has reconsidered her rejection of him in the light of their marriage vows (W, Ch. xlvii, p. 380), but if she recognizes a change in Fitzpiers, it is again a recognition of what is visible: "She had been struck with the change in his aspect; the extremely intellectual look that had always been in his face wrought to a finer phase by thinness, and a careworn dignity had been superadded" (W, Ch. xliii, pp. 349-50; italics added). The feelings renewed by those moments, added to the feeling that she has banished him help to rekindle a tender regard for him as she watches him leaving her father's property for exile (W, Ch. xliii, p. 355).

Her reflections prepare for the emotionally intense meeting at the man-trap and Grace's eventual return to Fitzpiers. The return to Fitzpiers rather calls into question her previous development. It signals, in her reaffirmation of her marriage vow, the breaking of another--the promise to visit Giles' grave weekly with Marty. It is not to be taken lightly that Grace fails to keep her appointment with Marty, and that Marty keeps her promise to Giles even after waiting for Grace two hours in the cold. That the novel closes with this scene indicates an unresolved tension in Grace's life, and emphasizes the compromise with which she must live. As in so many other instances, Grace has reacted to what is visible, in this case the very alive and persistent husband, and has let slide what is not visible, her devotion to Giles.

Grace's inadequacies are the result of the unresolved tensions between the romantic ideals of the woodlanders and the attraction to

surfaces of the outsiders. It is only when she looks beneath the surface, or is forced to look beneath it, that she begins to perceive the truth. Yet despite her occasional insights, because Grace remains from beginning to end a woman with less moral fibre than Bathsheba Everdene and less directing resolve than Eustacia Vye, she meets a more ambiguous end than either of them. The conflicting sensibilities lead her through a hard existence; she marries the wrong man and remains until his death untouchable by the right one--if one can say at all that Giles is "right" for Grace or that Fitzpiers is decidedly "wrong." The ambiguous end (will Fitzpiers indeed be soon "coling" at another's neck or does their reunion offer a "guarded faith in human destiny?"[16]) offers little solace, but neither does it have a tragic strain. Grace's tensions between rustic simplicity and cultured sophistication remain, despite the maturity she achieves. We respond to Grace with a certain unavoidable feeling that she has been swept along by forces stronger than herself and by the waves of the will of others. One cannot help feeling sorry that she can neither let Giles in nor keep Fitzpiers out. In her occasional glimpses of reality, in being the victim of unfortunate timing and circumstance, and in her moments of bitter confusion it is perhaps not impossible to anticipate in Grace another woman who is sacrificed for the social ambitions of her parents: Tess Durbeyfield.

The parent who so strongly influences Grace is not merely a man deceived by appearances, but one actively struggling to be deceived. George Melbury's essential naivete, his blindness, if you will, is a basic ignorance of the external social order in which he hopes to rise through his daughter. Like Winterborne and Marty, and to an extent

Grace, he has a romantic ideal which he applies to the reality he perceives. And that his first impressions of that social order (Fitzpiers' declaration of love for Melbury's daughter) should concur with his desires again reflects the deceiving openness of Hintock itself. Melbury cannot realize that the world is not as simple as he wishes or, in fact, perceives.

Melbury is introduced by the major conflicts of his life: he is overheard (by Marty South) bemoaning to his wife that, while he has promised Grace to Giles Winterborne as reparation for a past wrong, he feels that he has educated her to be suitable for a life on a much higher social scale than the woodsman can ever hope to provide. His romantic notions for Grace, his lack of insight into reality, and the foreshadowing of his failure is indicated in that scene by a short editorial intrusion:

> Melbury was perhaps an unlucky man in having the sentiment which could make him wander out in the night to regard the imprint of a daughter's footstep. Nature does not carry on her government with a view to such feelings; and when advancing years render the opened hearts of those that possess them less dexterous than formerly in shutting against the blast, they must inevitably, like little celandines, suffer 'buffeting at will by rain and storm.'
>
> (W, Ch. iii, p. 50)

Like Marty, Melbury's heart is open to public view; like Giles, he is attached to a romantic ideal, symbolized by his daughter's footprint lovingly preserved over many months. But to nature's government, and to the possibility of the emotional jars he will receive, he is as unperceiving as any bewildered child.

Melbury's motivation--and his basic fault--is to see what he wishes

to perceive. At the first opportunity of repudiating his vow to give Grace to Winterborne, he does so. He concludes that Felice Charmond's cooled attitude towards Grace is the result of her attendance at Giles' Christmas party, without considering that Mrs. Charmond may have found Grace unsuitable by reason of a too-attractive face: "full of this post hoc argument Mr. Melbury overlooked the infinite throng of other possible reasons and unreasons for a woman changing her mind" (W, Ch. xi, p. 113). Conversely, he leaps at the opportunity to align his family's fortunes with Fitzpiers without consulting his daughter first. He returns from the first interview with the surgeon "with the eye of a man who sees a vision before him" (W, Ch. xxii, p. 187). Indeed, Fitzpiers' occupation, social station and winning manner are to provide a blinder for Melbury for a long time. His intense hopes and fears for Grace are expressed, on the afternoon of Fitzpiers' first "courting" visit, paradoxically, as both obvious and hidden: "Could the real have been beheld instead of the corporeal merely, the corner of the room in which he sat would have been filled with a form typical of anxious suspense, large-eyed, tight-lipped, awaiting the issue" (W, Ch. xxiii, p. 183). Melbury's constrained manner, we are told, "was natural enough," owing to his ambitions. Yet no one in the room notices the real beyond the corporeal, and the game is acted out, for the present at least, according to Melbury's wishes.

His anxious wishes for Grace's happiness later undergo a reversal in the focus of attention but not in substance, when he looks to Giles as Grace's rescuer. Whereas Melbury had before been blinded to Winterborne's virtues he allows himself to be blinded to his faults. In doing so he forgets the initial cause of their unsuitability --Grace's

refinement compared to Giles' rusticity--and "was now blind to these subtleties, which he had formerly beheld as in noontide light" (W, Ch. xxix, p. 314). When he begins to realize, however, that Grace's marriage with Fitzpiers is not successful, he exercizes the "watchful loving-kindness" we have been told is necessary to reach the heart of Grace. The intelligence of Grace's situation comes to him as a new-found vision:

> The insight which is bred of deep sympathy was never more finely exemplified than in this instance. Through her guarded manner, her dignified speech, her placid countenance, he discerned the interior of Grace's life only too truly, hidden as were its incidents from every outer eye.
>
> (W, Ch. xxx, p. 248)

Thus he is a man capable of discovering truth; he discerns that Felice Charmond is the link between Fitzpiers' late-night absences and an exhausted horse splashed with mud which was not local. Norman Page notes that he "is a man of limited education and imagination, but he is a veritable Sherlock Holmes in his powers of reconstructing an incident from a horse's hoof-marks or a splash of unfamiliar mud."[17] His watching "pays off" with the discovery, through these small incidents, of Fitzpiers' betrayal. Thus Melbury gains a momentary glimpse into the truth. He perceives that his judgement has failed him, that it has, "like a false companion unmasked, . . . disclosed unexpected depths of hypocrisy and speciousness where all had seemed solidity" (W, Ch. xxxi, p. 253-4).

The humiliations, setbacks and heartaches produce a much abashed man. Unfortunately it is only after his will and his willful blindness have caused grevious harm that he finally declares to Grace, "I shall

never advise 'ee again" (W, Ch. xlv, p. 369). Notwithstanding his doubts about her wisdom in returning to Fitzpiers and a keen embarrassment at having roused his neighbours for a futile search for her, he acquiesces easily in her decision to remain with her husband. His end is perhaps as ambiguous as that of Grace. No dramatic death on the heath awaits him as it awaited Mrs. Yeobright; rather, it would appear, he is doomed to lead a life made public by the rash acts he has helped to cause and is at the same time to be made lonely by the loss of his daughter to an undeserving man.

The surgeon who becomes this inconstant husband is one whose perception is no less flawed than those around him. Yet as an outsider his blindness is defined as a blindness to inner truths, and a too keen sense of surfaces. His vulgar sexual appetite, an insensitivity to the human conditions despite his position as a surgeon, and an ingrained snobbishness which further cements his insensitivity are dramatized by his way of seeing and by the way he reacts to reality. Our introduction to him, following several glimpses of his light through the window of Grace Melbury's home, is on his visit to the ailing John South:

> His eyes were dark and impressive, and beamed with the light either of energy or of susceptivity--it was difficult to say which; it might have been chiefly the latter. That quick, glittering, empirical eye, sharp for the surface of things if for nothing beneath, he had not. But whether his apparent depth of vision were real, or only an artistic accident of his corporeal moulding, nothing but his deeds could reveal.
>
> (W, Ch. xiv, p. 132; italics added.)

His deeds reveal that his depth of vision is only apparent. Indeed, we are told only a few lines before of a deed which plainly reveals a myopic insensitivity as he enters the room "pre-eminently," because it

is in the house of a humble cottager. We see him "looking round towards the patient with a preoccupied gaze which so plainly reveals that he has well-nigh forgotten all about the case and the circumstances since he dismissed them from his mind at his last exit from the same apartment" (W, Ch. xiv, p. 132). This shallowness of vision and an insensitivity to the Hintock way of life manifests itself later--to disastrous consequences--when he mistakes the much more energetic horse of George Melbury for his own. That horse unseats him, and in his shakened condition he fails to recognize George Melbury as the man in whom he confides his marital woes.

Fitzpiers is one who is romantic and impulsive as well as morally obtuse. All these qualities are portrayed in his watching from the window of his home a series of different denizens of Little Hintock approach the newly painted gate nearby. The scene tells as much about the character of Fitzpiers as about the people he observes. Being "of a philosophical stamp he perceived that the character of each of these travellers exhibited itself in a somewhat amusing manner by his or her method of handling the gate" (W, Ch. xvi, p. 143). It is true that in Suke Damson he sees an unrefined and boisterous country girl, in Marty South a preoccupied mourner, and in Grace Melbury a "different sort of personage" who "walked as delicately as if she had been bred in town, and as firmly as if she had been bred in the country" (W, Ch. xvi, p. 143). Yet Fitzpiers does little to assimilate these glimpses into an awareness of character. His reactions to the different people, rather, reveals his character to us. The impression of Marty, for example, does not goad him into action to prevent her from soiling her dress, though he recognizes it is probably her only one and recalls that he himself

was the indirect cause of her bereavement. His memory of the recognition of Suke Damson's hoydenish character leads him later to indulge in a flirtation with her following the hot chase on Midsummer eve, and to embark on an affair with Suke which he dared not attempt with Grace. As well, his reaction to Grace's approach to the gate is most revealing of his character:

> To let such a creature touch it even with the top of her glove was to Fitzpiers almost like letting her proceed to tragical self-destruction. He jumped up and looked for his hat, but was unable to find the right one.
>
> (W, Ch. xvi, p. 144)

The romantic, melodramatic attraction, the desire to assist such a beauty (where he had no such desire to assist a mourning girl whose situation was known to him and for which he was partly responsible) bespeak a man who is motivated by self-interest. That he searches for the "right" hat before running to Grace's rescue is further proof of a self-centred sensibility.

It has been noted by J. Hillis Miller that "the collectively humanized world . . . absorbs a person and brings what he is thinking or feeling into the light where it is accessible to all."[18] Miller suggests that the scene of Fitzpiers witnessing the people at the gate is evidence of this human transparency. Yet Fitzpiers actually sees only what the others are like, not necessarily what they are. He does not see, or foresee, that Suke is a person with feelings which will later focus on him despite her marriage with Tim Tangs, that Marty's situation is sad as well as lonely, and that Grace is a "conjectural creature" whom he cannot categorize in such a brief glimpse. Therefore the fact

that elements of one's character can easily be detected by an observing eye does not necessarily mean that it will aid the observer. Fitzpiers is one of those whose basic insensitivity causes him to miss what is easily detected and to take an unrealistic view of others.

The first meeting of Fitzpiers and Grace is infused with an air of the superficiality and romantic impulse to which Fitzpiers is so subject. Before she appears in his parlour he has seen her from his window, as she walks past the painted gate; he has also seen her at her father's window, and been surprised at her humble origins. Now he sees her reflected in the mirror of his room. Windows, then mirrors, add to the feeling that Fitzpiers' views are superficial, cursory, and therefore unreal. The window both frames and distances, yet draws together by its transparency; Fitzpiers, seeing her from afar, has admired her beauty and her dignity. His response to the vision in the mirror contains these same elements, but emphasizes the superficiality of Fitzpiers' attraction: the mirror reflects surfaces. Furthermore, the scene possesses a dream-like quality for Fitzpiers because he has been sleeping and actually sees her in a "waking dream." Seeing her moments afterward approaching the house only heightens this dream-like feeling. "That he saw her coming instead of going made him ask himself if his first impression of her were not a dream indeed" (W, Ch. xviii, p. 158).

The dream-like quality of this first meeting, a sense of inaccessibility symbolized by the distance of the mirror and Grace's sudden departure, has a strong effect upon a sensibility based on surface attractions. Indeed, this superficial sensibility repeats itself later, and signals an almost unavoidable plunge into another romantic

adventure. On his first meeting with Felice Charmond, he recognizes a familiarity with "the sentiment and essence" of the moment. "What could be the cause of it? Probably a dream," he says to himself. That he establishes a relationship which breaks his marriage on the basis of a long-forgotten and minor past incident with the lady indicates the same unreal romantic tendency.

Thus Fitzpiers displays in this first meeting a willingness to act upon his impulses triggered by what he perceives as a "phenomenal girl." He disregards a recognition of their difference in social station as well as his own motivations (W, Ch. xix, pp. 164-65). The importance of these motivations returns to him when, "with a droll sort of awakening," he recognizes in their stay at the Earl of Wessex Hotel that Grace is of the same "species" as the other woodlanders, and therefore is of a different species from himself. The full reality of his marriage to Grace, and a major chord of discontent, is struck when he realizes that "the woman of the tribe without should be standing there beside him as his wife" (W, Ch. xxv, p. 209).

His discontent with his choice is thrown into focus when he is hailed that very evening to the side of the "injured" Mrs. Charmond. The romantic attachment for Grace which fades in the cold light of reality is supplanted immediately by a romantic--and equally unrealistic--attachment to Felice Charmond. Impressed by the lady's social station, her wealth, and the inaccessibility caused by his marriage to Grace, Fitzpiers launches himself into another trouble. (Appropriately enough, it is a revelation of the false additions to Felice's abundant tresses which eventually sparks their parting argument.)

The pattern of desire, infatuation, awakening and discontent

established with Grace is actually repeated in Fitzpiers' relationship with Felice Charmond. And the first two elements, at least, are repeated again when he returns to Hintock following Mrs. Charmond's death. He is already much chastened when he is hailed to One-Chimney Hut to find his wife at the bedside of the dying Giles Winterborne. He is unprepared for what he sees, and as he likens the scene to that which saw him the patient and Felice Charmond the nurse, his feelings of superiority vanish in an instant:

> Grace sat on the inside of the bed against the wall, holding her lover's hand, so that when her husband entered the patient lay between herself and him. He stood transfixed at first, noticing Grace only. Slowly he dropped his glance and discerned who the prostrate man was.
>
> (W, Ch. xliii, p. 346)

This moment of awareness, and Grace's avowed confirmation of his "extremist inference" that she has been unfaithful return Grace to the position of the inaccessible. He perceives that another has come between them emotionally, just as the dying Winterborne appears between them physically at this moment. That he eventually learns Grace did not break their marriage vow does not detract from the powerful effect of this scene.

Grace excites Fitzpiers' desire by her hesitancy in their subsequent meetings. Her declarations, first of animosity, then of indifference, strengthens her appeal. Moreover, the feeling of distance and inaccessibility is symbolized by his declaration to Grace "I shall come at least twice a week to look at your window" (W, Ch xlvi, p.373). In a sense, he has finally taken Winterborne's place in paying homage at the temple of Grace Melbury. Whereas before Giles had paused many a

time to view Grace through the windows of her father's home, it is now Fitzpiers' turn.

While the evidence does not support a view of Fitzpiers as an image of death,[19] our knowledge of the previous pattern of his insight tends to make us question the durability of his new-found love for Grace. Certainly he has not the moral idiocy of Francis Troy, but his superficial way of seeing things, and his unrealistic romantic impulses suggest a sensibility less than wise. George Melbury's suggestion that he will be "coling" at another neck than Grace's a year hence may or may not be true. But an almost imperceptible note is struck in Fitzpiers' assumption on the last night that "somebody has seen me for certain" and that they do not, therefore, need to notify Grace's parents that she is leaving with him (W, Ch. xlvii, p. 385). The insensitivity hinted in the sick-room of John South has not disappeared.

The woman who excites Fitzpiers' attention is the final point of the continuum between the naive woodlanders of Hintock who cannot see surfaces and the outsiders who cannot see inner realities. Felice Charmond lives in Hintock House, completely separated from the villagers. She is motivated, like Fitzpiers, by surface attractions, but has scarcely a trace of the knowledge of inner truths. Several critical moments in the action of the novel emphasize this superficial nature.

Felice is first attracted to Grace as a desirable companion. Her attraction to the young woman, however, is quickly destroyed by a very superficial experience: the sight of Grace's loveliness set against her own:

> Just before Grace's departure the two chanced to pause before a mirror which reflected their faces in immediate juxtaposition, bringing into prominence their resemblances and their contrasts. Both looked attractive as glassed back by the faithful reflector; but Grace's countenance had the effect of making Mrs. Charmond appear more than her full age. There are complexions which set off each other to great advantage, and there are those which antagonize, one of such killing or damaging its neighbour unmercifully.
>
> This was unhappily the case here. Mrs. Charmond fell into a meditation, and replied abstractedly to a cursory remark of her companion's.
>
> (W, Ch. viii, p. 92)

We recall that a mirror focused Fitzpiers' attention to Grace; it was a surface reflection to which he is susceptible. Similarly, the mirror image of Grace juxtaposed against her own emphasizes for Felice her own physical, surface shortcomings. That she chooses to act upon that superficial impression confirms our impression of her very questionable sensitivity.

Felice's one pretension to deep feeling is her love for Fitzpiers, motivated, it must be assumed, by his novelty and attractiveness. Once confronted by Grace's candour in the woods regarding her love for Fitzpiers, Felice resolves to end the relationship and to reject Fitzpiers. However, her resolve is crushed by an experience as visually powerful as any ever presented to a Hardy character, and it is one which plays upon her sensitivity to the surface of reality. Moments after Felice resolves to keep apart from her lover, she is presented, in the dark of night, with his bloodied face at her casement. She responds to his knock:

> What she saw outside might have struck terror into a heart stouter than a helpless woman's at midnight. In the centre of the lowest pane of the window, close to the glass, was a human face which she barely recognized as the face of

> Fitzpiers. It was surrounded with the darkness of the night without, corpse-like in its pallor, and covered with blood. As disclosed in the square area of the pane it met her frightened eyes like a replica of the Sudarium of St Veronica.
>
> (W, Ch. xxxvi, p. 293)

All elements of the conflict are present in this scene, just as they were in the closed door scene of The Return of the Native. Again Hardy dramatizes, in a a powerful vision, the central elements of the novel. Fitzpiers' presence is the result of his burning desire for the woman on the other side of the window; his condition is the result of his own insensitivity to his wife and her family, an insensitivity indicated by the rude confidences he gave Melbury without knowing his identity. The conflict between Grace and Felice Charmond is evident in Felice's firm resolve only seconds before to "shake her head at him, and keep the casement securely closed" in order to "keep faith with Grace." Moreover the powerful visual effect of the bloody face at the window rivets our attention. Mrs. Charmond of course opens the casement immediately and ministers to her wounded lover. Her direct reversal of resolve, "where were now her discreet plans for sundering their lives for ever? To administer to him in his pain, and trouble, and poverty, was her single thought" (W, Ch. xxxvi, p. 294), confirms her superficial attentions and the blindness associated with it.

The scene of the stricken man first discovered by the woman, then physically assisted by her in walking to a comfortable place, and subsequently nursed by her tenderly is repeated later with Grace and Giles. Hardy stresses the similarity, ensuring that his reader will not fail to notice. In effect, that earlier scene of Felice Charmond opening the casement to a desperately wounded Fitzpiers not only

contains the essence of the conflicts of the novel, but also serves as a comment on later love relationships.

The scene between Giles and Grace which Hardy likens to Felice Charmond's nursing of Fitzpiers is equally powerful in its visual impact. The earlier scene sees Felice's desire to help Fitzpiers against his enemies and his poverty as "her only thought." The trouble precipitating the event was not at all of her making, save her romantic involvement with Fitzpiers. The later scene, Hardy reminds us, "was yet infinite in spiritual difference." Indeed, Grace considers her involvement crucial to the trouble. "That she might have been the cause, or partially the cause, of all this, interfused misery with her sorrow" (W, Ch. xlll, p. 342). Grace had discovered him in his makeshift shelter, her sight of Giles at the moment of discovery being not unlike Felice Charmond's shocking vision of Fitzpiers.

> The side towards Grace was open, and turning the light upon the interior she beheld what her prescient fear had pictured in snatches all the way thither. . . . Both his clothes and the hay 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.
>
> (W, Ch. xlii, pp. 340-41)

Again, the basic elements of the scene are the same as that six months previous: the woman has decided to repulse the man (in this case Grace has done it twice--by not marrying him, and by allowing their current separation) and is forced by circumstances to reverse that decision. The difference between the scenes is a question of enlightenment: here Grace realizes her error in repulsing Giles, whereas in the former scene Felice Charmond actually denies the enlightenment she had attained in

her decision to sever her relationship. Grace recognizes here, with a sense not unlike Clym Yeobright's admission that "it was all my fault," that she is at least partly responsible for Giles' condition: "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!" (W, Ch. xlii, p. 340). She does not realize how true this is. Giles no less than she has punished them with "cruel propriety."

The two scenes therefore comment upon one another and upon the central conflicts of the novel. The psychology of the characters and the essence of the novel are encapsulated in the scenes of visual precision. David Lodge has noted that Hardy sought to portray "scene, gesture and image" as "a vivid and precise imitation of actuality, as a link in a chain of causation, as symbolic action and as part of a formal pattern of parallels, contrast, and correspondences."[20] Indeed, the striking visual power of these scenes, the pointed comparisons between love relationships, the intricate involvements of husband-lover-wife-lover--these elements are all brought together in the momentary visual experience.

The metaphors of blindness and vision, then, become in The Woodlanders more closely intertwined with character, situation, and environment than in previous novels. The blindness of Fancy Day, Francis Troy, or Clym Yeobright is not tied to their education outside the bounds of their simple homes; yet for Fitzpiers, Felice and even Grace, the fact that they have come from or been educated outside becomes part of their particular perspective. Similarily, it is in The Woodlanders where the opposite situation, rustic simplicity, becomes a hindrance to the perspective of the natives. Giles is beaten by the

surfaces of reality which he cannot comprehend; Felice is beaten by inner emotions which she cannot control. And Grace is confused by both the inner emotions and the surfaces.

The subtle associations of character, environment and perspective produce in The Woodlanders a frustrated feeling of inadequacy over the human ability to discover truth. Truth, in many ways like Little Hintock itself and like Grace, is "a shape in the gloom, whose true quality could only be approximated by putting together a movement now and a glance then, in that patient attention which nothing but watchful loving-kindness ever troubles itself to give" (W, Ch. v, p. 69). One might add that some of us are watchful, some have deep loving-kindness; few have both.

Conclusion

> As to pessimism. My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint--in this case human ills--and ascertain the cause: then set about finding a remedy if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimists is: Blind the eyes to the real malady, and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms.
>
> (Later Years, p. 183)

Appropriately enough, this assessment Hardy makes in a 1918 diary note can also serve as a comment upon the role of the narrators and the characters in the novels we have examined. The narrator is the pessimist: he recognizes the human ills and points to causes along the way to "diagnose the complaint." He seldom finds a remedy. The characters for the most part act the optimists: they literally and figuratively blind their eyes to the real malady, either within or without, and attempt to force experience to conform to desire.

Hardy's techniques in visual scene-making and exploring the motif of vision offer the reader an interesting perspective on this concept of optimists and pessimists. The reader is provided with emperical evidence and the larger point of view of the narrator; therefore we know the "complaint." Yet we see experience through the eyes of the different characters, who have blinded themselves (or been blinded by larger forces) and have suppressed the symptoms of the malady. In the face of strong evidence to the contrary, Eustacia places her hopes for an elegant future life in the hands of Clym; Grace places her future--twice--in the hands of Fitzpiers; Bathsheba rests her future

with Troy, Boldwood his with Bathsheba. The list is long; it may even be seen to include the complex Jude Fawley, whose boyhood vision of Christminster is a mirage in the distance.

Hardy's visual techniques inform us of these maladies. We see what the character sees, yet we also oftentimes see what is invisible to them. But Hardy does not, from novel to novel, present his characters' psychological and moral blindness as a static problem of perception; he explores all facets of insight, and dramatizes different influences and external conditions in expressing the nature of perception. His treatment of the visual experience shows a decided growth in his artistic development from the young eager novelist to the complex sage of literature. In Under the Greenwood Tree the framed scenes and visual effects reflect character and the fact that vision is limited and experience miscellaneous, but the visual effects tell little more than that a visually oriented writer will naturally have his characters use their eyes to judge one another and experience. However, Hardy's potential is clear; Fancy witnessing her two lovers approach in the rain marshalls the visual experience into an emotional one of such power that the scene changes the entire tone of the novel. Far From the Madding Crowd takes the visual experience and builds the character around it: Farmer Boldwood's abstraction from and utter defencelessness in the face of Bathsheba's flirtatiousness is suggested at the moment he receives the valentine, his eyes riveted upon it. Character becomes more complex in this novel, and the visual experience defines it. The Return of the Native introduces, or perhaps emphasizes, chance in human experience. The visual experience focuses the conflicts of character and circumstance: the closed door scene, for example, is a starkly

visual drama of misguided purposes, self-deceit, and a liberal does of "crass casualty" ("Hap," CP, p. 9). And The Woodlanders explores all facets of human perception within the context of the social order as well as of the indifferent universe. Grace's difficulties are centred upon an inherent difficulty between the romantic and simple environment of her home and the superficial, appearance-based influence of her experience in society. Indeed, it is as if Hardy wished to examine experience in these novels through as many different eyes as possible merely to ensure that, as he notes in his diary in 1884, "Experience unteaches--(what one at first thinks to be the rule in events)" (Early Life, p. 231).

It is interesting to note that the later main novels, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the d'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure rely less for their emotional impact on the visual experience than on larger concerns of the human conditions. Indeed, David Lodge has noted that "Hardy's bitterest, most pessimistic, most depressing novel, Jude the Obscure, is also the least descriptive and the least 'cinematic.'"[1] The protagonists of those novels as well achieve some limited recognition of the events of our lives. Tess resigns herself to the thought that "it is as it should be" (T, Ch. lviii, p. 447), Michael Henchard to a belief that "my punishment is not greater than I can bear" (MC, Ch. xliii, p. 334). However, as J. Hillis Miller notes of these tragic figures:

> The insight is only partial. Though the characters now understand themselves far better than when they still hoped for happiness, the reader is aware of some ironic incongruity between the protagonist's understanding of his life and the superior understanding of the narrator.[2]

The same "ironic incongruity" between the characters' understanding of

experience and the narrator's understanding, then, spans the body of Hardy's fiction. Experience is a troublesome thing. On one hand it is universal, part of the "great web" of human doings; on the other it is utterly personal and private, part of individual personality and the person experiencing.

As I have mentioned, Hardy himself maintains that his "philosophy" is "a confused heap of impressions, like those of a bewildered child at a conjuring show." That very visual image, so naturally expressed, becomes a recurring motif in the novels, and confirms Hardy's own expressed attitudes toward experience and a "philosophy" of life. It is not difficult to recognize Hardy's awareness of the conflict between the real and the visible in his personal statements. In his 1892 preface to Tess of the d'Urbervilles he maintains "the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor agressive, but in the scenic parts to be representative simply, and in the contemplative to be oftener charged with impressions than with convictions. . . . Let me repeat, the novel is an impression, not an argument."[3] In 1902 he reiterates the point that "unadjusted impressions have their value, and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena" (CP, p. 84). It would appear that this idea is based upon an argument put forward in Hardy's general preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912:

> Positive views on the Whence and Wherefore of things have never been advanced by this pen as a consistent philosophy. Nor is it likely, indeed, that imaginative writings . . . would exhibit a coherent scientific theory of the universe even if it had been attempted--of that universe concerning which Spencer owns to the 'paralyzing thought' that possibly there exists no comprehension of it anywhere. But such objectless consistency never has been attempted, and the

> sentiments in the following pages have been stated truly to be mere impressions of the moment, and not convictions or arguments."[4]

"Possibly there exists no comprehension of it anywhere." It is remarkable that a man can feel so strongly those disparate notions of the inadequacy of human vision and yet be so great a seer that he can delineate those inadequacies so accurately in fiction.

"The Scheme of Things is, indeed, incomprehensible;" Hardy writes to Alfred Noyes in 1920, "and there I suppose we must leave it--perhaps for the best. Knowledge might be terrible" (Later Years, p. 218). Hardy in the final analysis agrees not to know. His characters never really know either, although one feels that somehow they should have known. Clym should have seen Eustacia's motives. Dick should have seen that Fancy coquetted with him. Grace should have seen beneath Fitzpiers' "veneer of affectation." Giles should have seen the way to win Grace. Bathsheba should have seen Troy as a rake. All the information was there; but they, as we, fall short because of the distortions caused by their own personalities.

Life's experiences affect, confuse and ruin us; events happen seemingly without warning, and even in retrospect they can be understood but dimly. And each experience, unless we are numbered among a lucky few, does little to prepare us for the next. Always there is an uncertainty, a misunderstanding of what we see. Yet we are bound to make what deductions we can from the distorted impressions we receive. Those distorted impressions are all we have to extract meaning from what we experience. Most often we construct meaning, not according to actual reality, but to what we wish to see as reality. Impressions in line

with our wishes produce confidence. But just as we confidently raise a telescope to our eyes expecting the entertainment of a faraway spectacle, a figure in white fustian drops before our eyes and we are alone on the heath with a hanged man.

Notes

Introduction

[1] W. H. Auden, "A Literary Transference," The Southern Review vi (Summer 1940), 83.

[2] Joan Grundy, in Hardy and the Sister Arts (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), likens Hardy's narrative and descriptive techniques to "sister arts" such as painting, theatre, cinema, music and dance. Her analysis is interesting and provocative in many ways, but she ultimately contributes more by way of a catalogue of techniques rather than insight into meaning.

[3] Penelope Vigar, The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality (London: Athlone Press, Univ. of London), 1974, p. 18.

[4] Vigar, p. 15.

[5] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 64.

[6] J. Hillis Miller, Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 269.

[7] David Lodge, Thomas Hardy and Cinematographic Form," Novel 7 (1973), 250.

[8] Ian Gregor, The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction (Totowa, N.J.: Roman and Littlefield, 1974).

[9] Gregor, p. 41.

[10] Michael Millgate, in Thomas Hardy: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1982), pp. 62-63; and Robert Gittings in Young Thomas Hardy (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), pp. 60-61, who suggests that Hardy's main concerns were "his own sensations at the moment, and his own isolation."

[11] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy, p. 65. Michael Millgate also suggests that Hardy's memory of the execution is at work in his description of the death of Cytherea Graye's father in Desperate Remedies.

[12] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy, p. 65.

[13] Penelope Vigar, The Novels of Thomas Hardy: Illusion and Reality, p. 15.

[14] Ibid.

Chapter One: Under the Greenwood Tree

[1] Thomas Hardy, "Preface" to Under the Greenwood Tree, 1912 ed.; p. 29 of New Wessex ed.

[2] Barbara Hardy, "Under the Greenwood Tree: A Novel about the Imagination," The Novels of Thomas Hardy, ed. Anne Smith (London: Vision Press Ltd., 1979), p. 49.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy, p. 69.

[5] Penelope Vigar, The Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 91.

[6] J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire, p. 152.

[7] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy, p. 75.

Chapter Two: Far From the Madding Crowd

[1] Ian Gregor, The Great Web: The Form of Hardy's Major Fiction, pp. 54-55.

[2] Daniel Schwarz, "Beginnings and Endings in Hardy's Major Fiction," in Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy, ed. Dale Kramer (New York: Harper and Row, and London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 20.

[3] Ian Gregor, The Great Web, p. 55.

[4] Peter Casagrande, Unity in Hardy's Novels (Lawrence, Ka.: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982), p. 101.

[5] Frank Giordano, Jr., in "Farmer Boldwood: Portrait of a Suicide," English Literature in Transition, 21, No. 4 (1978), 244-53, notes that Boldwood is prevented from carrying out his suicidal wishes, but that, for the purposes of the narrative, he is the 'portrait of a suicide.'

[6] Ann-Marie Coughlan, "The Queen in Bathsheba Everdene," in The Thomas Hardy Society Review, 1, No. 8 (1982), p. 240.

[7] Ian Gregor, The Great Web, p. 34.

[8] Peter Casagrande, "A New View of Bathsheba Everdene," in Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy, ed. Dale Kramer (new York: Harper and Row, and London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 65.

Chapter Three: The Return of the Native

[1] The Woodlanders. Ian Gregor in The Great Web: the Form of Hardy's Major Fiction (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974) investigates the idea of a "great web" throughout Hardy's fiction.

[2] C. J. P. Beatty in "A Note on Clym Yeobright," The Thomas Hardy Society Review, 1, No. 8 (1982), 262-3, points to three earlier examples, in works with which Hardy was familiar, of the "divinity" in man shining out of him like a ray.

[3] Peter Casagrande, Unity in Hardy's Novels, p. 130.

[4] Frank Giordano, Jr., "Eustacia Vye's Suicide," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 22, No.4 (Winter 1980), 504-21, makes an excellent case for the argument that Eustacia did not drown accidentally but rather committed suicide.

[5] Joan Grundy, Hardy and the Sister Arts p. 109-110. Grundy's analogy, while accurate enough, offers little more than a tidy observation of the visual effect.

[6] Vigar, p. 128.

[7] J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire, p. 55.

[8] Ian Gregor, The Great Web, p. 95.

[9] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy, p. 66.

[10] "Hap," CP, p. 9.

Chapter Four: The Woodlanders

[1] By F. E. Hardy's statements in Early Life, p. 135, by John Paterson in The Making of the Return of the Native; Univ. of California English Studies, No. 19 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960) pp. 24 and 133, and by Peter Casagrande in "The Shifted 'Centre of Altruism' in The Woodlanders: Thomas Hardy's Third 'Return of a Native,'" ELH, 38 (1971), 104-125.

[2] As Peter Casagrande so aptly documents in "The Shifted 'Centre of Altruism'" by comparing The Woodlanders to Under the Greenwood Tree and The Return of the Native.

[3] Dale Kramer, Thomas Hardy: the Forms of Tragedy (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1975), p. 98.

[4] J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire, p. 109.

[5] Penelope Vigar, The Novels of Thomas Hardy, p. 32. Professor Vigar explores this motif at length in her study, maintaining that the darkness "is the perfect artistic milieu for a novel that depends so much on the need to distinguish reality from falsity."

[6] Dale Kramer, Thomas Hardy: the Forms of Tragedy, p. 102.

[7] Richard Hannaford, "'A Forlorn Hope?' Grace Melbury and The Woodlanders," The Thomas Hardy Yearbook (1981), p. 72-76. My perception of the character of Giles Winterborne is indebted to Professor Hannaford's analysis.

[8] Ibid., p. 72.

[9] Jean Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 222. Brooks maintains that Giles' role as "autumn's very brother" is symbolic of a fruitful relationship with Grace. However she fails to note that character's many deficiencies which tend to contradict this view.

[10] Dale Kramer, in Thomas Hardy: the Forms of Tragedy, pp. 97-98, argues that this lack contributes to the pathetic rather than tragic view of Giles.

[11] Jean Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, pp. 221-230.

[12] Dale Kramer, Thomas Hardy: the Forms of Tragedy, p. 98.

[13] The argument on the side of Grace's development is perhaps best presented by Richard Hannaford in "'A Forlorn Hope?' Grace Melbury and The Woodlanders," The Thomas Hardy Yearbook (1981), pp. 72-76.

[14] J. Hillis Miller, Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire, p. 124.

[15] Jean Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 225.

[16] Hannaford, "A Forlorn Hope?" p. 72.

[17] Norman Page, Thomas Hardy, p. 73.

[18] J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire, p. 108.

[19] Jean Brooks, Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure, p. 221.

[20] David Lodge, "Introduction" to The Woodlanders, New Wessex ed., p. 10.

Conclusion

[1] David Lodge, Thomas Hardy and Cinematographic Form," Novel 7 (1973), p. 254.

[2] J. Hillis Miller, Distance and Desire, p. 213.

[3] Thomas Hardy, "Preface" to Tess of the d'Urbervilles, New Wessex ed. (1891; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 29-30 (italics added).

[4] Hardy, "General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912" (1912; rpt. UGT, p. 222).

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