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Thomas Hardy: Death and the afterlife in the poems

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THOMAS HARDY: DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE IN THE POEMS

by

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CHAPTER 1

Hardy's Double Vision

While the novels of Thomas Hardy have attracted unflagging attention over the years, observers have long been puzzled by the lack of a strong critical tradition for his poetry. Hardy, during his lifetime, was himself frustrated by the public's apathy toward this aspect of his work. In 1918 he wrote to his friend Edmund Gosse in response to some questions the latter had raised while preparing an article on Hardy's lyrical poetry for the April issue of the Edinburgh Review. In it he stated:

> For the relief of my necessities, as the Prayer Book puts it, I began writing novels, & made a sort of trade of it; but last night I found that I had spent more years in verse-writing than at prose-writing! (prose 25 1/2 yrs--verse 26 yrs) Yet my verses will always be considered a bye-product [sic], I suppose. Selected Letters. (323)

Although Hardy had been secretly contemplating the idea of abandoning fiction and devoting himself to poetry for many years, when his first volume, Wessex Poems, appeared in 1898, the change in direction took the public by surprise. Few were aware that this well-known novelist had also been writing verse since his youth. In fact he had spent years perfecting his craft in private, experimenting with rhythm and meter, continually revising the best of his early poetry, and weeding out and discarding his less-successful juvenilia.[1]

From the very beginning critics were divided about the merits of Wessex Poems. Perhaps the most virulent reaction came from an anonymous writer in an article in the Saturday Review of January the following year, who savagely dismissed

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[1] Thomas Hardy, The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy, ed., Michael Millgate (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1985), 51, hereinafter cited as L&W.

Wessex Poems as a "curious and slipshod volume" filled with uncouth verses, stilted in sentiment, poorly conceived and worse wrought" ("Thomas Hardy as a Poet," 19). The majority of reviewers, however, were less hostile than perplexed by Hardy's unexpected divergence into new territory. Some were modestly respectful, or even generous in their appraisal of certain pieces. Others hedged, as did Lionel Johnson, when he praised the "arresting, strenuous, sometimes admirable" elements in the poems, while regretting their grimness and lack of joy (822-23).

Hardy, who was notoriously sensitive to adverse criticism, challenged, with predictable fractiousness, "the short-sighted belittlement" of his art "by these minor men" as he called them. He claimed most of the "fault-finding was, in fact, based on the one great antecedent conclusion that an author who had published prose first and that largely, must necessarily express himself badly in verse" (L&W, 319-20). Hardy claimed, on the contrary, that poetry "had always been more instinctive with him," and he had only neglected it for novel writing out of the necessity to make a living (L&W, 309-10).

The drudgery of reconstructing his novels, bowdlerized for serialization in family magazines, left him yearning to abandon fiction and devote himself solely to poetry. In 1890 he wrote:

> Christmas Day. While thinking of resuming 'the viewless wings of poesy' before dawn this morning, new horizons seemed to open, and worrying pettinesses to disappear. (L&W, 241)

Not only did poetry writing afford him far greater pleasure, it was also less likely to elicit adverse criticism, thus leaving him far more freedom to express controversial thoughts and feelings as another of his observations suggests:

> Poetry. Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion--hard as a rock--which the vast body of men have a vested interest in supporting. (L&W, 302)

In the end the scathing critical attack on his last two novels steeled his determination to take this major step, which he defended by saying: "A man must be a fool to deliberately stand up to be shot at" (L&W, 259).

Financially secure by this time, Hardy still had over thirty years of productive life ahead of him, during which time his creative genius flourished unabated. From the publication of Wessex Poems in 1898, to 1928 when his posthumous Winter Words appeared, Hardy produced, apart from his monumental verse dramas, eight volumes containing almost one thousand pages of lyric poetry.

Hardy's reputation as a poet has fluctuated over the years. Irving Howe points out how vulnerable it has been to the particular "cultural bias of the moment." Citing the multifariousness of Hardy's thought, Howe postulates that different strands have been chosen from it for special celebration at different times. For example Hardy's somber philosophical poems, which so preoccupied earlier critics are today considered among his less impressive efforts (Thomas Hardy 16). Kenneth Marsden claims further that Hardy's readership tends to increase during times of stress. He notes that his stock rose during the First World War and that "there was a similar, if less marked movement during the Second" (220). Hardy himself could not fail to be aware of the enormous surge in popularity enjoyed by his war poetry. Indeed, the near-jingoism of poems like "Men Who March Away" proved a potent stimulus to patriotism at the onset of hostilities in 1914 (L&W, 396).

Shortly after his seventy-ninth birthday in 1919, Hardy was presented with a beautifully bound volume of holograph poems, written in recognition of his contribution to

literature, by forty or fifty young poets of the day. With disarming modesty he acknowledged that this was "almost his first awakening to the consciousness that an opinion had silently grown up, as it were in the night, that he was no mean power in the contemporary world of poetry" (L&W, 422).

In a note in his edition of the Selected Letters Michael Millgate observes that, at this time, Hardy who had long thought of himself as:

> isolated and unappreciated as a poet . . . began to discover not only that his verse was receiving a greater amount of critical attention but that for a number of the younger poets--among them Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, and Walter de la Mare--he was a major creative presence, actively contributing to the shaping of their own imaginations and literary careers. (339)

During the nineteen-twenties, according to William R. Rutland, Hardy's poetry became almost a cult. By the thirties, however, in a changing critical environment, this trend began to seem "overdone" (264). By 1938 F. R Leavis, while conceding Hardy's integrity, dismissed him nevertheless as a "naive poet of simple attitudes and outlook" whose reputation to date was mainly "conventional." Leavis maintained that "his rank as a major poet" rested "upon a dozen poems" which were "lost among the vast bulk of verse interesting only by its oddity and idiosyncrasy" ("Hardy the Poet," 57-9).

As the New Critics began placing Hardy's verse under close scrutiny, their tendency was to recoil before an artifact more closely resembling a roughly carved wooden vessel than the well-wrought urn they venerated. Hardy's quirky diction, his deliberate roughing up of meter, and his stubborn avoidance of the "jewelled line," seemed to grate on fastidious sensibilities. Furthermore his simple directness of articulation left few paradoxes to be resolved.

Like many of his generation, R. P. Blackmur was ambivalent. He confessed to a "genuine enjoyment" of a

small number of the poems, while deploring Hardy's willful dismissal of tradition, and his vain "adherence to his personal and crotchety obsessions" in the majority of his work. He saw Hardy's "personal rhythm" as the "central problem in his poetry," even though, paradoxically, its very presence was also, at times, an element of his greatness. Blackmur believed that once his personality is felt it is found everywhere "not alone in his thirty or forty finest poems but almost everywhere in his work," sometimes as a positive force, but more frequently as a negative one (1-31).

The discomfiture aroused by the presence of a poet's personality in his work attests to the powerful influence at that time of T. S. Eliot, the modern promulgator of the theory that impersonality is a prerequisite of great poetry. And as Kenneth Marsden points out, Hardy, whose work reeks with his personal essence, would be the logical target of such theorists (215). In 1933 Eliot had launched a vituperative attack on Hardy, deploring his careless disregard for the literary "tradition," which rendered him free to indulge in a vulgar display of personal emotion in his work. Even worse, Eliot claimed, was the rejection of an orthodox system of Christian belief by writers such as Hardy, which had laid open a dangerous lacuna permitting "the intrusion of the diabolic into modern literature" (After Strange Gods, 56). Eliot nursed his grudge against Hardy until the end. Late in life he wrote: "when an author's mind is so antipathetic to my own as was that of Thomas Hardy, I wonder whether it might not have been better never to have written about him at all" (To Criticize the Critic, 24).

It may well have been better. Given the enormous authority Eliot commanded amongst the New Critics, Hardy's reputation was seriously undermined by his antagonism. A number of other critics, however, gallantly rose to Hardy's defense. In an article in The Southern Review in 1940,

Katherine Anne Porter heatedly challenged Eliot's charges, particularly those leveled at Hardy's moral character. In the same publication W. H. Auden told of his deep love and respect for the man whom he revered as his "poetical father" (86). Even Ezra Pound, Eliot's friend and early mentor, confessed in a 1934 letter to a friend: "Nobody has taught me anything about writing since Thomas Hardy died. More's the pity." (Letters, 264).

The conspicuous aura of "personality" surrounding Hardy's poetry continues to strike his readers; however, nowadays it is more commonly considered a source of pleasure than a drawback. Kenneth Marsden, for one, openly applauds it. Carefully distinguishing between Hardy the man and Hardy the poet, Marsden insists that it is the distinct personality of the latter which is the unifying force, indeed "the real source and centre" of the poetry (214-15).

It is surprising, therefore, that the poetry has received relatively little critical attention compared to the novels. Books about Hardy have tended to relegate it to a single chapter if they have dealt with it at all. However, as Dennis Taylor points out, this situation has been partially remedied in recent years by the appearance of some perceptive studies devoted to the poetry alone (Hardy's Poetry, xviii). Among them, three which I have found particularly valuable are, Marsden's fine critical introduction to the poems cited above, Taylor's own 1981 book, and more recently, William E. Buckler's The Poetry of Thomas Hardy appearing in 1983.

Yet areas of controversy continue to surface in Hardy criticism. Two of these revolve around the overwhelming volume of the poetry, and over just which poems deserve to be included among the rather small percentage of it generally deemed great. Drawing attention to the first of these two areas of dispute Irving Howe echoes the feelings of a number of critics when he complains: "The sheer quantity of Hardy's verse is discouraging. Who but a scholar or another poet can

be expected to read through the Collected Poems on the alert for the slender margin of Hardy's greatness?" (Thomas Hardy, 160). Kenneth Marsden reluctantly agrees insofar as to concede that "the problems of repetitiveness and inferior work" do probably necessitate a selective anthologizing of some sort. He insists nevertheless that:

> Hardy should be read, if not complete, at any rate in bulk; there is a large quantity of verse, both relatively and absolutely which needs to be read sympathetically and with the understanding gained by reading the better work, which is similar to it in essence anyway. It is common knowledge that his verse grows on the reader, but there is less chance of this happening if the cream--assuming it can be identified--is to be strained off into a "recognized" anthology. (223)

Philip Larkin, who is the first to admit his own poetic debt to Hardy, has been, perhaps, the most loyal of all the defenders of the older poet's prolific output. In 1969 he wrote:

> Curiously enough, what I like about Hardy is what most people dislike. I like him because he wrote so much. I love the great Collected Hardy which runs for something like 800 pages. One can read him for years and years and still be surprised, and I think that's a marvellous thing to find in any poet. (176)

A little earlier, bemoaning the lack of competent Hardy criticism, Larkin voiced his contempt for the "mediocre perpetrators" of the popular theory that only a small number of Hardy's poems, in relation to the aggregate, were seriously worthy of consideration. To them he retorted:

> May I trumpet the assurance that one reader at least would not wish Hardy's Collected Poems a single page shorter, and regards it as many times over the best body of poetic work this century so far has to show. (174)

As William E. Buckler points out, Hardy never aspired to "a poetry of exquisitely wrought, emotionally climactic, metaphorically explosive moments." Therefore he did not choose to prune the many slight and pedestrian pieces from his canon. These, in their own minor way, depict genuine components in the great web of human drama that Hardy strove to represent. Buckler calls them "the interstices, connections, or transitional pathways among the more eye-catching displays of 'mood and meter' in his poetic country" (The Poetry, 104).

As for the second major area of controversy, critics are surprisingly splintered on the subject of which poems actually constitute Hardy's narrow fringe of greatness. Marsden, citing a number of examples of conflict about the merits of specific poems states: "Disagreement among critics is normal" but in Hardy's case it seems excessive (2-3).

When, in the late nineteen-seventies, Trevor Johnson began compiling an anthology of Hardy's verse, his anxiety about what he should and should not include prompted him to make a numerical analysis of the choices made by all nine earlier anthologists including Hardy himself. The results revealed such astounding differences that Johnson believed it should lay to rest for ever F. R. Leavis's contention that only about twelve of the poems were of genuine worth. He concluded: "If there were really only a tiny corpus of unchallengeably great poems, surely all of them would inevitably be in all the anthologies" ("The Anthologist's Hardy," 21). This bewildering lack of consensus among critics could possibly be the result of a rippling-out of the questings and uncertainties Hardy himself so obviously experienced in his life. Citing the "many contradictions and variations" in his work, Marsden sees:

> an essentially simple, humble mind seeking for the light; sometimes by examining trifles, sometimes by speculations on a cosmic scale, but in either case seldom able to rest for long in any conviction and making poetry out of this inability. (81)

This of course raises the perplexing question of Hardy's philosophical outlook, a subject studied so exhaustively over the years that to probe it too deeply here would be redundant. Nevertheless some general observations on the nature of Hardy's thought and on the influences which shaped it are necessary to a fuller understanding of his work.

Hardy claimed he never tried to develop a systematic philosophy of his own. He called his view of life "a series of impressions" which he "had never tried to co-ordinate."[2] He repeatedly denied that his works of art set forth "a scientific system of philosophy," claiming his views were merely "seemings" or "provisional impressions . . . used for artistic purposes because they represent approximately the impressions of the age, and are plausible, till somebody produces better theories of the universe (L&W, 406). Earlier he had written that "after reading various philosophical systems, and being struck with their contradictions and futilities, I have come to this: Let every man make a philosophy for himself out of his own experience (L&W, 333).

Despite his disclaimers Hardy did have a relatively consistent philosophy, yet he was flexible enough to adjust his outlook according to changing conditions in the world. Moreover, despite his habitual reluctance to acknowledge any debt to earlier writers, he did not arrive at it as independently as he might have us believe. Although Hardy lacked a university education, he was a voracious reader. In his youth he steeped himself in Shakespeare, the Bible, and such classical authors as Aeschylus, Euripides, Horace, Lucretius, and many others.[3] In the midst of the intellectual upheaval of the nineteenth century Hardy claimed

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[2] Thomas Hardy, "Apology, " The Complete Poems, ed., James Gibson, (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 558. This volume is hereinafter cited as CP. Figures refer to poem numbers.

[3] Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography, (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 132, hereinafter cited as Biography.

to be one of the earliest admirers of Darwin's On the Origin of Species (Biography, 90), and its influence upon him is apparent in his writings. In his late thirties and early forties he read numerous works by such thinkers as Arnold, Carlyle, Mill, Stephen, Spencer, Macaulay, and Comte. Some of the darker works of philosophy he was reading at this time included Caro's work on pessimism and G.H. Lewes The History of Philosophy. Later he would encounter the pessimistic philosophers Schopenhauer and von Hartmann (Biography, 246).

It has long been fashionable to blame Arthur Schopenhauer for engendering Hardy's somber view of life. Charges accusing Hardy of excessive pessimism first surfaced during his early novel-writing career, they intensified violently after the publication of Jude the Obscure, and then continued as a matter of course throughout his final poetry-writing phase. Yet Hardy denied that he had fallen under Schopenhauer's influence, claiming his views had already been formed by the time he started reading his works (Biography, 199). He did concede, however, that Schopenhauer was one of the philosophers who commanded his respect (CP, "Apology" 562), and certain conspicuous parallels do exist between the patterns of thought of the philosopher and the poet. Again and again Hardy echoes Schopenhauer's "profound rejection" of life. Both see a world in which suffering is inevitable, and the only happiness to be won a momentary cessation of pain. Therefore death should be welcomed as a sweet release from the misery of life (Beardsley, 646-728). A poem like "Before Life and After" (CP, 230) is typical of the many where Hardy expresses a longing for the peace of the grave. Bewailing the "disease of feeling" that is life, and longing for the oblivion which preceded it, He implores:

> Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
> How long, how long?

It seems not unwarranted to link Hardy's apparent distaste for life to his early loss of religious faith. Even

after he ceased to believe he considered himself emotionally and by instinct a "churchy" man (L&W, 407). He had grown up in a rural community where simple Christian piety was a way of life. He never lost his affection for the beauty of the orthodox rituals and for the old hymn tunes familiar to him since childhood. When he abandoned the dogmas of the church at an early age he felt the loss deeply. As Irving Howe describes it:

> Hardy was a skeptic, not with the sneer of the disbeliever who has shaken off priestly bonds, nor with the indifference of the rationalist to whom faith is never so much as a possibility, but with the gnawing and tender regret of the lapsed Christian who wishes to believe but cannot. (Introd. to Jude, x-xi)

Howe relates how, ruefully, under the influence of Darwin, Spencer, Mill, Huxley, and later Schopenhauer, Hardy was forced to the conclusion that no "transcendent creator" presided over a universe in which meaning was inherent. Instead, the revelations of nineteenth-century science left him reeling under "the vision of existence as a lawful but purposeless process." Howe believes that Hardy's conviction that the force behind things is "neither moral nor immoral, but unmoral" could have easily led him "to a kind of cosmic desolation, a sense of having been abandoned, a feeling that man, unguided, is insignificant in the scheme of things" (xi). Elsewhere Howe writes that the melancholy tone found throughout Hardy's work really does not require special justification. It may simply reflect a deep current of despair over the human condition, running all through Western literature from the time of the Greek dramatists (Thomas Hardy, 27).

It could also be possible that Hardy was genetically programmed to be melancholy, that he simply possessed a humor in which "black bile" predominated. Although, as a rule, he impatiently denied being pessimistic, there are instances

in his writing where he seems to find that emotion a perfectly justifiable response to life. For example, one entry in his Personal Notebooks alludes to various biblical jeremiads:

> "All creation groaneth," &c.
> "Man that is born of woman," &c.
> "Man dieth and wasteth away," &c.
> "I go hence like the shadow that departeth," &c.
> Is that pessimism, & if not, why not? The answer would probably be because a remedy is offered. Well, the remedy tarries long. (28)

At another time he defends pessimism as a good way to hedge one's bets in life:

> A pessimist's apology.--Pessimism (or rather what is called such) is, in brief, playing the sure game. You cannot lose at it; you may gain. It is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed. Having reckoned what to do in the worst possible circumstances, when better arise, as they may, life becomes child's play. (L&W, 333-34)

Yet another entry in his Personal Notebooks defending pessimism poses the question: "Was there ever any great poetry which was not pessimistic?" (27).

David Wright is one critic who refuses to take this kind of pessimism seriously. He simply attributes it to Hardy's "rather depressed nature" which he seems to have actually enjoyed. Wright fully accepts Hardy's self-assessment that he is an impressionistic, rather than a philosophical, poet, and he finds his poetry all the better for it, particularly when it derives from a careful recording of his "unadjusted" and fleeting glimpses of life (72-3).

In view of the fact that Hardy had led a long, relatively uneventful life, his glumness so exasperated one old friend, the Positivist leader Frederic Harrison, that he made a testy attack on its sincerity in February 1920 in the Fortnightly:

> Byron, Shelley, Keats were all exiles from home, decried, destined to early death abroad. And yet their pessimism was occasional. but Thomas Hardy has everything that man can wish--long and easy life, perfect domestic happiness, warm friends, the highest honor his sovereign can give, the pride of a wide countryside.

Harrison concluded by saying it was clear therefore that the "monotony of gloom" in his poetry was "not human, not social, not true."

Hardy, who never forgave Harrison, expressed his profound annoyance at this and other such attacks in the "Apology" which prefaced his next volume of poems, Late Lyrics and Earlier (Biography, 542). In it he proclaimed that his alleged pessimism was in reality "evolutionary meliorism" which he describes as a series of "questionings in the explorations of reality" which would constitute "the first step toward the soul's betterment and the body's also" (CP, 557). Only by frankly recognizing the ills of the world can their remedy be sought, or, in the words of his earlier poem, "If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst" (CP, 557).

This guarded hope for a better world seems to echo the Positivism of Auguste Comte, another philosopher whom Hardy read and admired. Comte's sanguine view of reality was, in effect, the perfect antidote for Schopenhauer's dark vision. Positivism was a pragmatic philosophy with a firm belief in scientific progress. It was predicated on an individual's love for, and obligation toward, his fellow creatures. It was called the "Religion of Humanity" in which the human race was elevated to fill the space vacated by outworn deities of the past. Above all, it was a doctrine of hope, promising a better world to come (Beardsley, 730-764).

Hardy openly acknowledged his respect for Comte, albeit with many reservations. He claimed that, although he did not subscribe to the doctrine of Positivism himself, no thinker at that time could afford to stand entirely aloof from its

theories (Bjork I: 311-12, n. 618). In the "Apology" Hardy strikes a chord similar to, if far more muted than Comte's, when he concedes the potentiality, at least, of a better world in the future, if only:

> pain to all upon it, tongued or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving-kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces--unconscious or other--that have 'the balancings of the clouds', happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often. (CP, 558)

Hardy's evolutionary meliorism appears to have been at a high-point during the writing of The Dynasts which he ended on a note of mild optimism. During that time he expressed the hope that the "Unconscious Will of the Universe" was becoming gradually "aware of Itself," and as it became fully conscious he hoped it would ultimately prove to be "sympathetic" (L&W, 360-61).

But Hardy moved back and forth between the poles of cautious optimism and pessimism in accordance with his observations on changing conditions in the world. Buckler stresses the tentativeness of Hardy's meliorism, noting his tendency to keep his "options fluid" (The Poetry, 57). The provisional nature of Hardy's outlook is attested to by the fact that his pessimism was forcibly reawakened, at least for a time, by the horrors of World War One. Hardy claimed at that time that the war had destroyed his long-held belief in "the gradual ennoblement of man." Christianity had certainly failed in its goal. A poem written late in life, "Christmas 1924" (CP, 904), is a ruthlessly sardonic comment on this failure:

> 'Peace upon earth!' was said. We sing it.
> And pay a million priests to bring it.
> After two thousand years of mass
> we've got as far as poison gas.

Hardy stated he probably would have ended The Dynasts differently "if he could have foreseen what was going to happen within a few years." In his disillusionment he felt he could no longer nourish any conception "of a fundamental Wisdom at the back of things" (L&W, 398).

Although so much emphasis has been placed on Hardy's philosophy over the years, there have always been a few critics willing to take the poet at his word when he denies that his writings contain any specific scientific theory or system of philosophy. Yet starting from a similar premise they sometimes arrive at surprisingly different conclusions. John Crowe Ransom, for example, derided Hardy's evolutionary meliorism, calling it "a synthetic oleomargarine which stern Darwinians used to spread over the bread of doctrine when they denied themselves the old-fashioned butter of belief in a moral order." Although Hardy paid lip service to the concept, Ransom found none of it at all in the poetry, which contains only the bleak, ironic vision of a "confused and unimproving universe" ("Honey and Gall," 6).

Allen Tate, in the same volume of essays, was equally dismissive of Hardy's philosophy, which he called an "ill-digested . . . melange" of the various writers he had studied. Tate saw its absence in some of the poetry, however, as a positive factor, because it is when Hardy is at his least philosophical, when he is closest "to the immediate subject," observing directly, and recording those direct impressions that he exhibits "the greatest freedom of sensibility" of which he, as a poet, is capable (107-8).

More recently, in a thoughtful essay on the subject, A.O.J. Cockshut has developed these concepts further. He claims that Hardy was never really a philosopher in the classical sense. He had nothing in common with the scholarly, "logic-chopping" professional reasoner. Instead he was a sensitive, reflective man whose reasoning faculty was less developed than the emotional component of his

nature. As an autodidact his understanding of formal philosophy was limited:

> He did not think of the philosopher as a wise man . . . or as a master of an academic discipline. He thought of him as a man with a neat destructive system that would probably tend to show that life was not worth living. (142)

While Hardy found this world view harsh and repellent, intellectually he felt obliged to accept it, perhaps even according it an unmerited degree of respect. Its influence certainly seems to account for the joylessness prevalent in his grimmer cosmological poetry. Cockshut insists, however, that it was really the "literary quality" of certain philosophers that attracted Hardy far more strongly than their thought. He claims, for example, that he was not nearly so concerned with Schopenhauer's reasoning "as with the tone of his thinking" (144).

Cockshut observes how another side of Hardy clung to the less-logical, more imaginative aspects of the mind. He was irresistibly drawn, for example, to the "traditional superstitions and irrational customs" of the simple country folk amongst whom he had grown up. Cockshut believes that it is the instinctive, primitive allusions, the oxen kneeling on Christmas Eve, that characterize some of his most human, most moving poetry (147).

If the rational and the emotional coexist in Hardy's verse it is because they represent two contrasting ways of viewing the world. Over and over again he depicts the universe as a vast network of interwoven strands. When his philosophical mood is in the ascendant he become obsessed with the overall picture in which life is symbolized by a great web, the mindless handiwork of the Immanent Will which randomly determines, for good or ill, the fortunes of hapless mortals. However, when Hardy surrenders to the more human, emotional side of his nature he focuses in on the fragile threads woven into the web which represent the specific life

courses of ordinary individuals. Images of webs, networks, or of tapestries woven from crisscrossing filaments recur so frequently in Hardy's poetry that Dennis Taylor calls this pattern a "basic underthought" distinctive to his work (Hardy's Poetry, 42-9).

Hardy's most striking treatment of the web image occurs in The Dynasts. When this ambitious verse drama was in the planning stages he made a note on the proposed method of composition:

> The human race to be shown as one great network or tissue which quivers in every part when one point is shaken, like a spider's web if touched. (L&W, 183)

The Dynasts is the definitive example of Hardy's two ways of viewing reality. He constantly moves from a narrowly focused description of individual protagonists and their deeds to zoom outward to take in the wide-angled panorama of Europe in the context of the Napoleonic Wars as a whole. For example, one stage direction, coming directly after a close-up of a particular skirmish, changes the scene dramatically to the wide view:

> At once as earlier a preternatural clearness possesses the atmosphere of the battle field in which the scene becomes anatomized and the living masses of humanity transparent. The controlling Immanent Will appears therein, as a brainlike network of currents and ejections, twitching, interpenetrating, entangling, and thrusting hither and thither the human forms. (I: VI, iii)

While Hardy's two kinds of vision relate to the two sides of his temperament, the philosophical and the emotional, they also correspond to his oscillations in mood. In his most pessimistic moments the big picture dominates, in which man is a helpless pawn in the vast impersonal network. But when he surrenders to his more positive emotions he focuses on the fine, interwoven strands representing the

little thoughts, feelings, and doings over which ordinary human beings have a modicum of control.

In the "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," William Wordsworth describes the poet as differing not in "kind" from other men, but only in "degree." And in "Resolution and Independence" he would seem to imply that this difference is the poet's greater capacity to experience extremes of emotion:

> But as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
> Of joy in minds that can no further go,
> As high as we have mounted in delight
> In our dejection do we sink as low. (IV)

It is true, certainly, that Hardy was much more even of temperament than a poet like Hopkins, who could plummet from the zenith of the Windhover's ecstasy to a spiritual nadir which pitched him past pitch of grief. Hardy, on the contrary, liked to describe his mood changes as merely: "Tasting years of moderate gladness / mellowed by sundry days of sadness" (CP, 916). Yet while his oscillations may have been less extreme than those of some poets they were nevertheless very real. In his biography Millgate states that while he was "extraordinarily consistent and persistent at the deepest levels of personality and of purpose, at more superficial levels [he] was capable of rapid changes of mood." Millgate adds that Hardy's "deepest depressions were . . . capable not only of coexisting with outward geniality but also alternating with periods of actual cheerfulness" (381). Cockshut, agrees that Hardy's "morbidity" was not a settled conviction, but a phenomenon that occurred only occasionally and represented only one side of his personality (141-8). Hardy himself acknowledged this, admitting that the inconsistent views to be found throughout his work were a "direct reflection of his personal shifts in feeling and outlook" (Biography, 381). This would substantiate the notion that his mood at the moment of writing governed

whether he looked at the whole web from a distant and pessimistic perspective, or whether he closed in for the narrow, more human, more comforting view.

There were times, however, when he succeeded in embracing both views simultaneously, and the resulting tension between them created a stereoscopic depth and richness characteristic of his finest work. Hardy clearly stated the purpose behind his deliberate attempt to juxtapose the two points of view in the preface to his novel Two on a Tower:

> This slightly-built romance was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men. (v)

Hardy's mode of shifting back and forth to incorporate the two perspectives has by no means gone unrecognized by his readers. As early as 1916 Harcld Child commended his unique "double vision" which enabled him to see simultaneously the trivial and the infinite (21).

W.H. Auden claimed that the thing he valued most in Hardy was his "hawk's vision, his way of looking at life from a very great height." He saw this as a means by which an arbitrary society could be made to appear more tolerable to the individuals trapped within it:

> To see the individual life related not only to the local social life of its time but to the whole of human history, life on earth, the stars, gives one both humility and self-confidence. For from such a perspective the difference between the individual and society is so slight, since both are so insignificant, that the latter ceases to appear as a formidable god with absolute rights, but rather as an equal, subject to the same laws of growth and decay, and therefore one with whom reconciliation is possible. (83)

D. H. Lawrence was even more lyrical in his praise of this exceptional quality, believing its presence in Hardy's work placed him among such great writers as Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Tolstoy. He was struck by Hardy's gift of:

> setting behind the small action of his protagonists, unfathomed nature; setting a smaller system of morality, the one grasped and formulated by the human consciousness within the vast, uncomprehended and incomprehensible morality of nature or of life itself surpassing human consciousness.

It was this dual viewpoint, he maintained, that created the "magnificent irony" in the works, while at the same time it gave them their beauty (419).

Among the many more modern critics who have observed this same quality, J. Hillis Miller probably explores it in greatest depth in his book Thomas Hardy: Distance and Desire. He believes, along with Lawrence, that it is this "superimposition of the engaged view and the detached, wide view" pervading Hardy's writing which "is the source of its characteristic ironies." Furthermore, he infers that a "double perspective" of some kind was not limited to Hardy, but was a general peculiarity of nineteenth-century thought (10).

Carol Christ, in her perceptive study of Victorian sensibility, The Finer Optic, supports this view. She begins by contending that: "Literary theorists from classical times to the present day have asserted that poetry contains a peculiar union of the universal and the particular" (1). She argues that the relative importance which should be given to each of these two elements within art was a question of genuine concern to Victorian thinkers. She believes, however, that it should not be so much a matter of giving priority to either "abstract universals" or "concrete particulars," the real issue should be "the definition of the dynamic between the two." Christ concludes that it is the way in which the general and the particular interact and

interpenetrate each other which can create a new kind of poetic vision which she calls "the good moment" (105).

Perhaps we could substitute Hardy's own term, "moments of vision," to describe those priceless instances where his wide, universal view and his narrow close-ups hold each other in perfect counterpoise to produce his most vivid three-dimensional pictures of life.

I believe that this force, both tensile and ocular in nature, which strengthens and vivifies the web of Hardy's poetry as a whole is just as surely at work in the strands of which it is composed.

Giving a slightly different twist to his favorite image Hardy applies it to his method of creating a work of art. He describes how the artist is free to tease out whichever threads he chooses from life to follow, and by working his own creative magic upon them he can bring out color and vitality in art to the drab and insignificant in reality:

> As in looking at a carpet, by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another, so in life the seer should watch the pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to nature; yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind. (L&W, 158)

Taking this metaphor yet one step further, Miller applies it to the literary critic as he, in turn, approaches the work of the artist. He describes how all the texts of Hardy's individual works, when placed side by side, become woven together to form a single fabric. In order to unweave it and evaluate its meaning, the critic must enter, and become part of this fabric. Miller explains:

> A literary text is a texture of words, its threads and filaments reaching out into the pre-existing warp and woof of the language. The critic adds his weaving to the Penelope's web of the text, or unravels it so that its structuring threads may be

> laid bare, or reweaves it, or traces out one thread in the text to reveal the design it describes, or cuts the whole cloth to one shape or another. (viii)

In this manner I too propose to single out just two strands to follow from the multicolored carpet of Hardy's poetry. These are the topics of Death and the Afterlife. I choose them, in the first place, because I regard them as integral to the poems, and secondly, I believe that these particular themes, especially in respect to how they interact with each other, have not been given as yet the critical attention they deserve.

Perhaps the most pervasive thread running through Hardy's poetry is the pale thread of death. To be "half in love with easeful death" seems a natural response to a life in which humanity's best hopes "unbloom". There are literally hundreds of poems about death, dying, and the grave, and even poems not primarily concerned with this subject frequently contain images that symbolize death, such as graveyards, tomb stones, memorial plaques, death knells, and coffins, to name but a few.

Interlaced with the theme of death is another thread that can only be called life-affirming. It frequently surfaces in poems where Hardy seems to be searching for some kind of immortality, where, despite his inability to believe in a traditional Christian afterlife the grave can be conquered after all. While either of these threads may be the more eye-catching at specific moments, both are always present.

On numerous occasions in poems about death, conceived in moments of sadness, a hint of something perdurable beyond the grave will alleviate the sense of despair. In "Friends Beyond" (CP, 38), for example, the poet's dead friends and neighbors have not passed into a state of total oblivion. They still have feelings and thoughts as the first five stanzas demonstrate:

William Dewy, Tranter Reuben, Farmer Ledlow late at plough,
Robert's kin, and John's, and Ned's,
And the Squire, and Lady Susan, lie in Melstock churchyard now!

'Gone' I call them, gone for good, that group of local hearts and heads;
Yet at mothy curfew-tide,
And at midnight when the noon heat breathes it back from walls and leads,

They've a way of whispering to me--fellow-wight who yet abide--
In the muted, measured note
Of a ripple under archways, or a lone cave's stillicide:

'We have triumphed: this achievement turns the bane to antidote,
Unsuccesses to success,
Many thought-worn eves and morrows to a morrow free of thought.

'No more need we corn and clothing, feel of old terrestrial stress;
Chill detraction stirs no sigh;
Fear of death has even bygone us: death gave us all that we possess.'

The first four lines of the poem state flatly that these people are dead and gone. Then in line five the word "yet" signals an antistrophe. From that point on the matter-of-fact tone vanishes and the language becomes lyrical. Although they are gone their presence lingers, and they still have a sufficient degree of consciousness to communicate to the living their feeling of real triumph now that they are free from the cares of ordinary life. In his beautiful coinage "stillicide" Hardy deftly fuses this sense of a tranquil half-life with the idea of death.

Hardy's curious afterlife is not synonymous with eternal life, however. It at no time presupposes the everlasting bliss or damnation of Christian theology. It is a gentle, tenuous state of uncertain longevity, colored by varying moods, and fluctuating in degree of awareness. The dead may be kept alive in the memory of those who loved them, or their

essences may be absorbed into the living things growing above their graves. Hardy has a wide variety of ways of releasing the dead from mere oblivion and of giving them some kind of continuity. But each one of these ways is subject to the caprices of the living or the vagaries of nature. In other words it is an afterlife cut down to human scale, with all of life's particularity and limitations in time and space.

Death, on the other hand, is perhaps the greatest of all universal themes. It comes inevitably and remorselessly to all living things, and unlike Hardy's afterlife, it is eternal. Yet when he juxtaposes these two themes the "bane" is turned to "antidote" as two opposing forces come into play, thanatos the destructive pull toward the grave, and eros the positive life force that counterbalances it. It is the tension between these two polarities, one general one particular, as they come into conflict and hold each other in counterpoise, that animates some of Hardy's most memorable poetry.

Considering the large number of poems concerned with death it is surprising that no full-length study of the subject appears to have been undertaken. It is true that many critics acknowledge its centrality in a general way. Blackmur, to cite just one, recognizes the fact that some of Hardy's "best effects" are a product of his "triple obsession with death, memory, and time" (11), but he does little to develop the concept further.

The afterlife has suffered even greater neglect. Kenneth Marsden, who does have some insightful comments on the subject, does not distinguish between Hardy's finite afterlife and immortality. James Granville Southworth, who also conflates the two, devotes a single paragraph to the subject, part of which reads; "Hardy has not primarily written much on immortality, although many of the poems on death touch on the subject" (98). I believe, on the contrary, that the afterlife is a vital element in the poetry, and that up until now it has been virtually

overlooked. Above all, nowhere to my knowledge has the unique relationship between death and the afterlife been investigated.

In the following chapters I will attempt to demonstrate their interdependence through a series of close readings of poems in which the two themes appear in all their various aspects. Death-related poems , for example, diverge widely in mood and content, ranging from the way death as a state is experienced by ordinary mortals to the cosmic implications of the death of gods. There are poems about the inevitability of death, and there are warnings and premonitions of its imminence. Sometimes death is the crowning achievement of a life well spent, while at other times life is prematurely or violently terminated. The vastly differing attitudes displayed by the living towards the dead, and the precariousness of an individual's reputation after death, are also recurrent motifs. To these can be added poems obliquely related to death where such topics as the nature of oblivion, sterility, and Hardy's strange state of "unbeing" are addressed.

The poems dealing with the afterlife are equally diverse. The dead often continue a shadowy existence as ghosts revisiting their familiar haunts. Sometimes they leave their permanent imprint on the houses they have dwelt in and on the objects they handled on a daily basis during life. They may be preserved in the memory of loved ones still living, or in the works of their own hands and brains. Others defy death's decay by living on in works of art or marmoreal monuments raised to commemorate them. Some prolong existence by blending their disintegrating atoms into growing things in the natural world, while others immortalize themselves by passing on their genes to their offspring. Occasionally they even succeed in eluding the temporal and finite world altogether to become rarefied essences drifting eternally around in the universe.

All these themes pervade Hardy's work from first to last. Because his subject matter remained relatively constant throughout his life those who have tried to trace his poetic development have had difficulty in finding evidence of any appreciable change over time. However, I believe with many others that the remarkable elegiac sequence, "Poems of 1912-13" written in memory of his first wife, represent the culmination of his poetic achievement. I hope to demonstrate that it is in these poems above all others that the mystical interaction between the themes of death and the afterlife is the force that brings into being Hardy's most compelling and beautiful verse.

CHAPTER 2

"Life and Death Are Neighbours Nigh"

The general themes of death and the afterlife in Hardy's poetry are more complex than they may at first seem to be because each of them embraces a number of subordinate themes. In fact they are like rich strands of yarn into which are twisted many finer filament or plys. Two of these subordinate strands in particular, if singled out and studied separately, amply demonstrate Hardy's obsession with death. The first of these is his fascination with the various accouterments of death, in particular the resting places of the dead. As J. Hillis Miller observes:

> His imagination is stirred by graveyards, funerals, coffins, passing-bells, ghosts, skeletons. No motifs recur more vividly in his poems than these, or so bring out the brooding lyric intensity which is his special note as a singer (Distance and Desire. (223)

The other substrand is his extreme curiosity about death as a state. Miller notes further Hardy's fascination with "the material state of the dead and . . . their surroundings." He imagines him wondering what it would really feel like lying under the ground enclosed in a coffin (223). Hardy's widely differing accounts of this experience are probably explorations aimed at satisfying this curiosity. Throughout the poems the state of death ranges across a wide continuum of consciousness. Perhaps most typical are poems in the middle of this continuum where death is depicted as a restful sleep. To move from the center toward the end in one direction is to see death deepening through various gradations of lessening consciousness into the most profound oblivion. To move in the opposite direction is to observe the dead progressing through increasing degrees of wakefulness until, at the end, they approach a state of

consciousness closely mimicking life itself, in which, as ghostly visitants, they can not only think and move from place to place, but actually commune with the living.

While Hardy is not always consistent in his attitude toward the dead, he almost always sees them as having transcended life, as beings privileged far above those who must still endure the pain and sorrow implicit in the living world.

One of the characteristics typical of the first of these subordinate strands is Hardy's particular attraction to graveyards with their unworldly atmosphere of quietude and enduring repose. Roger Ebbatson, in his introduction to A Pair of Blue Eyes, points out how frequently scenes are set in a graveyard, "always Hardy's favourite locale" (30). Hardy's autobiography reveals this fictional trope to be a direct outgrowth of his real-life attachment to the graveyard surrounding Stinsford, his local parish church. There are frequent references to Stinsford churchyard throughout the book, and it was probably no accident that the upper windows of the home he built for himself at Max Gate looked northward over the meadow to that place where so many of his closest family members, as well as the friends and acquaintances of a lifetime, had been laid to rest (409). Drawing on his early architectural training he had personally designed headstones for several of the Hardy graves, including that of his wife Emma, alongside of whom he fully expected to be buried one day himself (485). Over the years he made regular pilgrimages to the family tombs, carefully tending them, scraping away the encroaching moss, and placing flowers upon them (476). Throughout his long life Stinsford remained one of his dearest haunts, and until shortly before his death he continued to enjoy the walk from Max Gate across the beautiful water-meadows, to the churchyard he called "the most hallowed spot on earth" (477).

The churchyard became the inspiration for such delightful poems as "Voices from Things Growing in a

Churchyard," "Friends Beyond," and "The Dead Quire," Hardy's deep affection for the real Stinsford is movingly expressed as he transmutes it, through the alchemy of art, into Mellstock Churchyard, a place of eerie tranquillity where his immortalized friends and neighbors, incurious now about all petty human doings, are free at last to enjoy "the very gods' composure". Another poem, "Looking Across" (CP, 446), describes the memories evoked as he looks from Max Gate over to where his loved ones now lie. I quote the entire poem in order to demonstrate the cumulative effect of four successive bereavements on the poet's own yearning for the peace of the grave:

I

It is dark in the sky.
And silence is where
Our laughs rang high;
And recall do I
That One is out there.

II

The dawn is not nigh,
And the trees are bare,
And the waterways sigh
That a year has drawn by,
And Two are out there.

III

The wind drops to die
Like the phantom of Care
Too frail for a cry,
And heart brings to eye
That Three are out there.

IV

This life runs dry
That once ran rare
And rosy in dye,
And fleet the days fly,
And Four are out there.

V

Tired, tired am I

Of this earthly air,
And my wraith asks: Why,
Since these calm lie,
Are not Five out there?

This poem is dated December 1915, shortly after the death of Hardy's beloved sister Mary, the fourth person of the poem. Those who preceded her one by one were presumably his parents and Emma his wife (Purdy, A Bibliographic Study, 202). The poem refers to the New Year's Eve following Mary's death, a time when Michael Millgate believes Hardy "was oppressed by a sense of personal mortality caused by these successive deaths (L&W, Introd. xi), and renouncing his usual custom, he did not wait up to hear the bells heralding the new year, but like those "out there" he slept through the night quite oblivious to their chimes (L&W 409).

Although this poem memorializes the passage of time and the inexorable coming of death, the grief implicit in it is muted and contained. Its spare diction and minimal structure heighten the awareness of absence and loss. The trees bare of leaves are a solemn reminder that another year has come to an end after taking its toll of lives. Along with the gradual dropping away of the living comes an analogous diminution of the elements of water and air and of the sounds associated with them. The sap of life that "once ran rare / And rosy of dye" has now dried up. And where laughter once filled the air there is now silence, broken only by the mournful sighing of the waterways, and the barely audible sound of wind, "too frail for a cry," as it dies in the thinning "earthly air." As these sounds fade, subtler resonances, imperceptible to the ear, begin to echo in the imagination. For example, the monotony of tone is accentuated by the meager rhyme scheme. There are only two rhymes in the whole poem, and they tick-tock steadily through it not unlike a clock marking off time in the background. At the same time the numbers relentlessly adding up in the last

line of each stanza strike with the sonorous insistence of a funeral knell.

By ending the poem with an unanswered question the poet creates a deliberate sense of incompleteness. No real closure will be possible until he too is "out there" with the four who have gone before him. His own life has grown arid, lonely, and increasingly wearisome with each successive bereavement, but those who have already departed share a mute companionship in the restful calm of the grave. Tacit in the poem is the message that death confers benefits unavailable to the living, and that out there with them is where he really wants to be.

Vindicating the poet's excessive interest in burial places, Kenneth Marsden states:

> If Hardy seems to spend too much time in the graveyard and sometimes to be a little too at ease there, it is well to remember that he had many literary ancestors who shared this taste, and that this is one of the habits in which his rural upbringing and closeness to the emotions of the common man show clearly. (63)

These observations seem particularly pertinent to "A Drizzling Easter Morning" (CP, 620), a poem written from the point of view of the ordinary, overworked farm laborer, buffeted by the elements and tired to the point of pain. Ironically, the "endless rest" he yearns for can only be found in the grave.

> And he is risen? Well be it so . . . .
> And still the pensive lands complain,
> And dead men wait as long ago,
> As if, much doubting, they would know
> What they are ransomed from, before
> They pass again their sheltering door.
>
> I stand amid them in the rain,
> While blusters vex the yew and vane;
> And on the road the weary wain
> Plods forward, laden heavily;
> and toilers with their aches are fain
> For endless rest--though risen is he.

Not only is life on earth compared unfavorably with death in this poem, the desirability of a heavenly afterlife is also called into question. In fact the central tenet of Christian typology--that the risen Christ foreshadows a blissful resurrection of the dead--is ruthlessly undercut. The words "weary" and "laden heavily" allude ironically to Matthew 11:28, where Christ bids his followers: "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." However Hardy's dead men greet this promise of heavenly leisure with skepticism. They are disinclined to forego the "endless rest" they are already enjoying for the dubiety of life in any form.

In its ironic dismantling of the Christian hope of a resurrection, "A Drizzling Easter Morning" seems to echo expressions of spiritual disappointment written by earlier poets after George Eliot's translation of D. F. Strauss's Life of Jesus appeared in 1846. Its disclosures about the unreliability of the Gospels prompted such poems as Arthur Hugh Clough's "Easter Day, Naples 1849," with its embittered refrain: "He is not risen no, / He lies and moulders low; / Christ is not risen." Yet, as Samuel Chew observes, Hardy's reaction to these same disclosures was less idealistic than that of some of his predecessors like Clough and the young Arnold, who groped and vacillated as they anxiously attempted "to retain emotionally ideas and hopes they repudiated intellectually." Clough, for example was able to rebound from the acute disillusion of "Easter Day," to the qualified belief of its companion poem "Easter Day II," which, while still denying the supernatural aspects of the resurrection, could yet find spiritual comfort in its symbolism. Hardy, on the other hand, consistently refused "false consolation and empty hope," as he faced, squarely and pragmatically, some of the more difficult issues of faith (Chew 18). In "A Drizzling Easter Morning" he does not flinch from acknowledging that although this holy season

returns annually, the "endless rest" his burdened "toilers" yearn for is far less likely to be found in the blissful paradise it promises than behind the "sheltering door" of an ordinary grave.

If Hardy's skepticism was at the root of his tendency to glorify death, he often leavens the lump of that gloomy subject with his characteristic wry humor. For example, in "Channel Firing" (CP, 247), one of Hardy's better-known poems, he treats the hesitancy of the dead to be resurrected with delightful irreverence, as an indulgent God personally reassures the deceased that He is not yet about to disturb their tranquillity:

> 'Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
> I blow the trumpet (if indeed
> I ever do; for you are men,
> And rest eternal sorely need).'

According to Miller, what Hardy appreciates most about the dead is "their lilting insouciance, their carefree irresponsibility . . . as if a great weight has been lifted from their shoulders (Distance and Desire, 223). But Hardy is not always consistent. In other poems where he exploits his fondness for churches and their burial grounds he is more equivocal about his preference for death over life. For example irony mellows to gentle whimsy in "While Drawing in a Churchyard" (CP, 491). In this poem the blissful dead are equally reluctant to be awakened, but here the speaker distances himself from their message by standing behind the persona of a yew tree in the graveyard, whose roots among the dead, and whose branches among the living, make it an apt intermediary between their two worlds. In stanza three the artist at work amid the tombstones overhears, and then merely repeats, the yew's complaint that the living fear death because they are sadly misinformed about its advantages:

> 'If the living could but hear
> What is heard by my roots as they creep
> Round the restful flock, and the things said there,

No one would weep.'

Then in stanza four the tree, in turn, repeats the words of the dead that its roots too have only overheard:

'"Now set among the wise"
They say: "Enlarged in scope,
That no God trumpet us to rise
We truly hope."'

Although the dead represent themselves as elevated to a godlike stature, and express no wish to relinquish their condition, the validity of their message crumbles as it passes through this complex series of quotes within quotes. By the time these words pass from the dead, to the yew, to the speaker, and finally to the reader, their authenticity might be called into question.

Even more ambivalent are the sentiments expressed in "Regret Not Me" (CP, 318), a poem whose surface simplicity conceals its manifold paradoxes:

Regret not me;
Beneath the sunny tree
I lie uncaring, slumbering peacefully.

Swift as the light
I flew my faery flight;
Ecstatically I moved, and feared no night.

I did not know
That heydays fade and go,
But deemed that what was would always be so.

I skipped at morn
Between the yellowing corn,
Thinking it good and glorious to be born.

I ran at eves
Among the piled-up sheaves,
Dreaming, 'I grieve not, therefore nothing grieves.'

Now soon will come
The apple, pear, and plum,
And hinds will sing and autumn insects hum.

Again you will fare
To cider-makings rare,

And junketings; but I shall not be there.

Yet gaily sing
Until the pewter ring
Those songs we sang when we went gipsying.

And lightly dance
Some triple-timed romance
In coupled figures, and forget mischance;

And mourn not me
Beneath the yellowing tree;
For I shall mind not, slumbering peacefully.

The formal appearance of this poem alone justifies quoting it in its entirety. Lines one and two of each stanza contain four and six syllables respectively. Together they equal the ten-syllabic line three. However, had Hardy molded these lines into pedestrian couplets, they would have lost all the visual appeal on the page of these gracefully shaped triplets. Moreover the increasing length of the lines in each tercet matches the weight of its gradually unfolding message. The organic integrity of the individual stanzas virtually allows them to stand independently of each other like a string of delicate haiku. Yet at the same time their cumulative effect is far greater than the sum of the parts.

Ostensibly this poem, like so many others, is a panegyric to death. But whereas "A Drizzling Easter Morning" makes its point by presenting life, with its toil and pain, as a sorry alternative to the peace of the grave, this poem, while openly denying life, is really insidiously and obliquely validating it. In fact only in the first stanza and the last, with their references to peace and carefree slumber, is the case for death's ascendancy really pressed with any conviction. Inside these two framing stanzas the poem divides into two equal parts. The first of these, comprising stanzas two through five, slips from the present tense into the past, as the dead speaker looks back with tolerant nostalgia upon a youth during which self-indulgent ecstasy was purchased at the price of wisdom and

accountability. Yet the paralyzing stasis of the dead person presently lying under the tree contrasts dismally with the animal vivacity conveyed by the verbs of motion, describing how, in his lifetime, he "flew," "moved ecstatically," "skipped," and "ran."

From this past perspective the next four stanzas project into the future. Along with this shift in tense comes a lengthening of the diurnal cycle, connoted by the words "night," "heydays," "morn," and "eves," in the first part, to the leisurely richness of a seasonal time-span in part two. Autumn will soon be coming with its harvest of fruits and its traditional country celebrations. If the speaker's recollections of his past youth were not enough to make life sound enticing, his lovely description of the hedonistic pleasures of the season could scarcely fail to charm the most jaded of readers. Yet the harvested sheaves and the "yellowing tree" are also reminders of life's transience. And the speaker's detailed evocation of life's fleeting sweetness, and his hortatory "gaily sing" and "lightly dance" lend a carpe diem quality which would seem to belie his insistence that his passing is no matter for regret.

Incidentally, it is probably quite misleading to assume the masculinity of this dead speaker, whose sex is nowhere indicated in the poem. This figure in the grave is, in effect, sexless as well as solitary. In contrast, the joyous eroticism of the "coupled figures," so vividly alive remind one of Andrew Marvell's tart observation: "The Grave's a fine and private place, / But none I think do there embrace." The doubleness of meaning inherent in this poem constructs, and simultaneously deconstructs its affirmation of death.

In most of the poems discussed above the dead are pictured as "slumbering peacefully." Yet paradoxically they are also conscious enough at times to recall their past lives and to make pertinent remarks about life in general. Calling death a sleep is certainly not new. In fact it is probably

one of the oldest euphemisms of all. Ross C. Murfin draws attention to one typical example of its use in a long tradition, "The Lament For Bion" attributed to Moschus, in which death is called a sleep: "both sound and long a sleep that is without waking" (152). Yet Hardy refreshes the metaphor, and sometimes even extends it by calling the grave a bed. For example, the dead woman in "Something Tapped" (CP, 396), petulant about being cold in her "lonely bed," urges her beloved to come and join her without delay. The idea of the tomb as a continuation of the conjugal bed appears again in "In Sherbourne Abbey" (CP, 726), where the carved effigies of "stately husbands and wives" lie on their tombs "side by side as they anciently slept."

Sometimes the sleep of death can be disturbed by unusual events in the world, like the "gunnery practice out at sea" in "Channel Firing," or the preparations underway in "The Coronation" (CP, 307), which awaken the long-dead kings and queens in Westminster Abbey, who have been happily drowsing away, "freed from Life's old thrall, / And heedless, save of things exceptional."

If death is nothing more or less than a peaceful slumber, with the possibility of a return to consciousness on special occasions, it does not seem such a dreadful prospect after all. It is not life's irrevocable termination. Nor is it immortality on the cosmic scale of Christian theology. Yet is it, indeed, one kind of afterlife, although on Hardy's modest, more human scale.

There is another large body of poetry, however, which depicts life so bleakly that even this somnolent semi-conscious kind of afterlife leaves too much latitude for feelings of despair. At these times the poet longs for the sweet release of total oblivion. Miller sees a connection between poems of this nature and the times when Hardy tends to view the world from the wide, overall point of view, seeing it as a vast web in which the Immanent Will randomly weaves the fates of powerless mortals. On these occasions

the poet removes himself to a safe distance in order more clearly to take a "full look at the Worst" (Distance and Desire, 7). Having once observed that suffering is man's inevitable lot, consciousness becomes intolerable. Out of this experience emanate poems like "A Wish for Unconsciousness" (CP, 820).

> If I could but abide
> As a tablet on a wall,
> Or a hillock daisy-pied,
> Or a picture in a hall,
> And as nothing else at all,
> I should feel no doleful achings,
> I should hear no judgement-call,
> Have no evil dreams or wakings,
> No uncouth or grisly care;
> In a word, no cross to bear.

This short poem divides up into two equal parts which follow an "if this--then that" formula, not unlike a logical syllogism. The verb "abide" in line one has many shades of meaning; "to await," "to endure without yielding," "to withstand," "to bear patiently," "to remain stable or fixed in a state," "to continue in a place," and, "to acquiesce in," are some of its connotations. All of them, however, imply existence. The speaker is describing how he would like to be after death. A "tablet on a wall" suggests a memorial plaque in a church, "a hillock daisy-pied" could be his flower-covered grave mound, and "a picture in a hall" his portrait in a gallery. By their very nature these insensate objects would assure him a measure of continuance by preserving his memory. But if he could go even further, if he could actually become one of these objects, adopt its identity, and "abide" in its shape and form, then he would be guaranteed an afterlife in a state of unconsciousness far more profound, and consequently far more free from pain, than the fitful, dream-filled slumber of the poems discussed earlier.

Another poem demonstrating the conditional nature of this wished-for state is "Freed the Fret of Thinking" (CP,

721), in which consciousness is synonymous with the awareness of one's own mortality. It begins:

> Freed the fret of thinking,
> Light of lot were we,
> Song with service linking
> Like to bird or bee:
> Chancing bale unblinking,
> Freed the fret of thinking
> On mortality!

If the "birds of the air" of the Sermon On the Mount are alluded to here, the lightsome "lilies of the field" are recalled in the final stanza:

> Loosed from wrings of reason,
> We might blow like flowers,
> Sense of time-wrought treason
> Would not then be ours . . .

Had we never acquired "thought-endowment" nothing could have prevented us living moment by moment in happy ignorance of "Creation's groan". Nor would we have fallen victim to the treason wrought by time, which is the awful knowledge that in time we must die. Outside of time we exist in an eternal present.

According to Miller, whenever Hardy views the world from the wide, objective perspective, he attempts to free himself from time and space in order to stand outside of them altogether (Distance and Desire, 7). Curiously, in this poem, he accomplishes this grammatically in a way, by avoiding the temporal specificity of the indicative mood, and slipping into the subjunctive, in which past, present, and future are but murkily defined. Another function of the subjunctive mood, to express a contrary-to-fact condition, is fulfilled here too, when the speaker wishes for a state of blissful ignorance that is no longer possible since the evolution of consciousness.

Hardy sometimes compares the dawning of consciousness, unflatteringly, to the spawning of a disease. In the strange

and fanciful dream poem, "The Aërolite" (CP, 734), he conjectures that at some unspecified time in the remote past a "germ of consciousness" escaped on a meteor from a distant planet, and landed, quite by chance, on our earth. While it was perfectly benign in its native environment, the hatching and pandemic spread of this "stray exotic germ" wreaked havoc in ours, where it:

> . . . operated to unblind
> Earth's old-established ignorance
> Of stains and stingings,
> Which grin no griefs while not opined,
> But cruelly tax intelligence.

Here, as in the mythical Eden, the unblinding of mankind from prelapsarian innocence leads to the disturbing uncovering of the evil and suffering that exist in the world.

"The Aërolite" represents a groping back toward the beginnings of our species, yet while the Genesis myth is implicit in the poem it remains a subtext to the pseudo-scientific hypothesis of how evil and pain came to be recognized in the world. Hardy's well-known fascination with the scientific theories of his day is the springboard from which he takes an imaginative leap into the realm of science fiction. His disclaimer that he only "dreamed" consciousness was born in this strange way allows him the poetic latitude to combine the fictive with the empirical.

That the invasion of the earth by the "germ of Consciousness" happened "aions ago" is significant in the light of Gillian Beer's observations on the dramatic impact on Victorians of certain discoveries in the fields of geology and evolutionary theory. She describes how it was particularly distressing to them to learn that the world was far older than had previously been believed. Realizing that man's origins were lost beyond recall in the inconceivably distant past, many grew anxious merely contemplating how much human history had been forgotten. Furthermore, Charles Darwin's theory that innumerable species, far more than the

mind could imagine, had lived, died, and been forgotten over the ages, intensified fears that our own species was inevitably slipping toward extinction. Unlike many of his contemporaries Hardy remained relatively unperturbed by these disclosures. He saw our present state of consciousness as the pathological condition, and actually welcomed the rebirth of "normal unwareness." Citing this unusual readiness to accept the inevitability of coming annihilation, Beer describes Hardy as: "a writer who was willing to encounter the activity of forgetting, to let go origins, and to encompass oblivion--with pain certainly, but without panic" (81).

"Before Life and After" (CP, 230) is perhaps Hardy's most graphic expression of the abhorrence he feels for the malignant condition he believes feeling and thought beget.

A Time there was--as one may guess
And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell--
Before the birth of consciousness,
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;
None cared whatever crash or cross
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
How long, how long?

F. B. Pinion has drawn attention to the way in which this poem begins with an inversion of "There was a time," the opening words of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" ode (85). Therefore it is not surprising that, although Hardy's short lyric bears little outward resemblance to Wordsworth's intricately wrought and impassioned ode, the two poems do have a thematic bond in

that both depict life as a disappointing trade-off for a better time which preceded it. To Hardy, however, neither life, nor the time before it, measures up to Wordsworth's opinion of them. Wordsworth's Earth, in compensation at least, "fills her lap with pleasures of her own;" whereas in Hardy's poem life on earth is an unrelieved "disease of feeling." And while Wordsworth's anterior life is spent with God in idyllic joy and glory, Hardy's is nothing more than a state of numb oblivion in which the sole advantage over life is the total absence of pain.

Although Hardy loved and revered his predecessor he could not share the Romantic vision of a benevolent universe. His attitude toward nature was complex as well. While, like the Romantics, he was irresistibly drawn to the beauty of the natural world he rejected sentimental notions about its role in human life. David Perkins sees Hardy as a divided sensibility, belonging to the Wordsworthian tradition in a way, but with serious reservations. He suggests that Hardy:

> did not believe that nature could ever be a quasi-divine, ministering Presence, but neither could he simply accept the situation and let nature alone . . . [H]e shares Wordsworth's primitivism to some degree; he finds in nature sources of beauty, resigned wisdom, and sympathy; but at the same time he rejects Wordsworthian hopes and writes to expose them. (A History of Modern Poetry, 158)

William Buckler addresses Hardy's dismissal of Romantic optimism even more directly. Noting that although Hardy uses Wordsworth's phraseology in his Apology to describe his own "obstinate questionings" and "blank misgivings" concerning the presence of evil in the world, this does not imply that his reaction to the problem was the same as was Wordsworth's. In fact Buckler sees "a clear progression on the emphasis on obstinacy and blankness from Wordsworth to Tennyson and from Tennyson to Hardy, an ever-stronger inclination to take a 'full look at the Worst'" (The Poetry, 60).

In his bleakest moods, for example, Hardy does not simply express a gentle nostalgia for the time before birth, he states flatly that he wishes he had never been born at all. Michael Millgate, in his biography of Hardy, stresses "the absoluteness, the literalness, with which he believed that not to be born was best, that consciousness was a curse, and that while death might be distressing to the bereaved the dead were not themselves to be pitied" (411). Although Hardy usually bridled at being labeled a pessimist, Millgate records a conversation with William Archer in which Hardy qualified his objection by stating: " . . . people call me a pessimist; and if it is pessimism to think, with Sophocles, that 'not to have been born is best,' then I do not reject the designation" (410). Hardy later distilled his convictions into the sonnet "Thoughts from Sophocles" (CP, 924), which closely paraphrases the words of the chorus in lines 1200-1250 of Oedipus at Colonus (Pinion, 264). The first two quatrains read:

> Who would here sojourn for an outstretched spell
> Has senseless promptings, to the thinking gaze,
> Since pain comes nigh and nigher with lengthening days,
> And nothing shows that joy will ever upwell.
>
> Death is the remedy that cures at call
> The doubtful jousts of black and white assays.
> What are song, laughter, what the footed maze,
> Beside the good of knowing no birth at all?

In spite of these somber lines one needs to remember just how volatile in mood Hardy could be. For example, in the poem discussed above, "Regret Not Me", although it also ostensibly praises death; song, laughter, and dance, which are treated dismissively here, are activities to be treasured, and instead of dreading birth, the dead speaker of that poem recalls with nostalgia skipping at morn, "Between the yellowing corn, / Thinking it good and glorious to be born." Yet this kind of spontaneity about life is far rarer for Hardy. More typical are poems such as "To an

Unborn Pauper Child" (CP, 91), and "The Unborn" (CP, 235), in each of which his powerlessness to prevent the neo-nascent from entering this world of pain is a cause for anguish. In the former, he pleads: "Breathe not, hid heart: cease silently / And though the birth-hour beckons thee, / Sleep the long sleep." But his admonishment falls vainly on the "locked sense" of the oblivious embryo. In the latter, while visiting the "Cave of the Unborn" in a dream, his heart is wrung as he realizes the disillusion awaiting the trusting shapes who crowd around him, impatiently seeking confirmation about the glorious experiences they believe lie ahead of them in life.

Certain of Hardy's letters demonstrate, perhaps even more forcibly than these poems, that his periodic rejection of life was no mere pose. In one of these, written in 1891, condoling H. Rider Haggard on the death of his ten-year-old son, he added: "Though to be candid, I think the death of a child is never really to be regretted, when one reflects on what he has escaped" (Collected Letters, Vol.I: 235). In 1917 he wrote in a similar vein to his friends Sir Henry and Lady Hoare after their only child had died from war wounds. Adapting some lines from Macbeth he described how those who remain alive compare poorly "with the one who has got safely to the other side--has achieved death triumphantly and can say: "Nor steel nor poison--foreign levy--nothing / Can touch me further" (Collected Letters, Vol. 5: 235).

A concept even more extreme than this simple wish for an escape to the unconsciousness existing before birth and after death is the desire to have one's life obliterated altogether as though it had never occurred. Miller cites instances of the strange longing for "this ultimate form of vanishing" by the characters Tess, Jude, and Henchard in the novels. He believes its strongest expression appears in "Tess's Lament" (CP, 141), a poem "written as it were in the margin of Tess of the D'Urbervilles and as a commentary on it" (Distance and Desire, 222). The poem begins: "I would that folk

forgot me quite," then, after reciting a list of the events in her life that brought her to the point of wishing for the total annihilation of her memory, Tess exclaims:

> I cannot bear my fate as writ,
> I'd have my life unbe;
> Would turn my memory to a blot,
> Make every relic of me rot,
> My doings be as they were not,
> And gone all trace of me!

If being preserved in the memory of the living after one's death constitutes one form of afterlife in Hardy's epistemology, even this, at times, is shunned by his characters if their lives have been too painful. According to Miller, they seem to "suspect that unless they can be forgotten completely they may not, after all, escape from suffering when they die" (220-22). Yet as Miller observes further, although Tess longs to have every "trace" and "relic" of her existence obliterated, paradoxically, Hardy gives her the very immortality she flees by the act of writing about her (239). By making a permanent record of her life in his art he endows her with one more of his multiple versions of the afterlife.

If the state of "unbeing" stands at one end of the continuum of consciousness after death, at the other extreme are Hardy's ghosts. In their ability to think and talk and move from place to place, they lead an afterlife so much more animated than their oblivious or slumbering counterparts that they seem almost alive. Hardy's fascination with ghosts is very evident in his poems, where they exist in multitudes under a variety of synonyms such as "phasm," "phantasm," "shade," "spectre," "soul," "spirit," and "sprite." Hardy admitted to a life-long curiosity about the preternatural. He once claimed he would give ten years of his life to see a real ghost, adding:

> I should think I am cut out by nature for a ghost-seer. My nerves vibrate very readily, people say I

> am almost morbidly imaginative; my will to believe is perfect. If ever a ghost wanted to manifest himself I am the very man he should apply to. But no--the spirits don't seem to see it! (Biography, 38)

Ghosts may have disappointed Hardy by their reticence in real life, but he indulged his passion for them to the full in the fantasy world of his poems, where they may evoke amusement, even affection, but never fear. It must be pointed out, however, that Hardy states clearly elsewhere, that his belief in these supernatural phenomena was not of the old, superstitious variety. He saw himself as a modern, scientific thinker whose belief in "spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams, [and] haunted places," was of a purely imaginative nature, to be drawn upon to furnish kindling for his art (L&W, 400). John Crowe Ransom observes:

> We have to concede Hardy's ghost-people early in our acquaintance with his verse. They are ubiquitous but they do not strain the will to believe unless we are very literal naturalists. Their behavior is wholly decorous, for they do nothing but haunt their former scenes and mouth their memories, they are invisible to all but the imaginative or the conscience-ridden among the living, and they never try to meddle in the workings of the natural world from which they have been severed. ("Honey and Gall," 8)

Ransom chooses the poem "The Garden Seat" (CP, 518) by way of illustration:

> Its former green is blue and thin,
> And its once firm legs sink in and in;
> Soon it will break down unaware,
> Soon it will break down unaware.
>
> At night when reddest flowers are black
> Those who once sat thereon come back;
> Quite a row of them sitting there,
> Quite a row of them sitting there.
>
> With them the seat does not break down,
> Nor winter freeze them, nor floods drown,

For they are light as upper air,
They are light as upper air!

Ransom concedes that this is not one of Hardy's best poems, and, indeed, it does seem rather facile at first reading, and its doubled lines somewhat redundant. Nevertheless there are signs of thoughtful composition to reward the careful reader. For example, the superimposition of the supernatural over the natural order of existence creates strange and interesting tensions and analogies.

There are two subjects in the poem: the seat, an artifact in the real world, and the ghosts who populate the world of the supernatural. Each of these subjects has undergone a change of sorts, and each of these transformations is accompanied by an appropriate image of a change in color. The seat, prone as it is to the laws of the everyday world, has changed for the worse. It has grown old, deteriorated with use, and is on the point of collapse. Over the years, as it has aged, its original smart green paint has faded to a pale, thin blue. As for the ghosts, their silent return to the garden is marked by a change in the color of the flowers from the vivid red they flaunt by day to the black of night. This change parallels the change the ghosts have undergone when they passed from the world of the living into the realm of death. However in their case it would appear to be a change for the better. In the first place they are now quite impervious to the elements which once would have harmed them, and secondly, they no longer contribute to the deterioration of their favorite seat by burdening it with their corporeal mass. Now shadowy and weightless they place absolutely no strain on the environment. Yet they are not totally obliterated. Some faint trace of their individuality does manage to linger on in the atmosphere where they once sat to enjoy the garden's beauty. They are experiencing an afterlife, albeit in the most rarefied of states. And in some uncanny way their

presences are mildly comforting, a reassurance that there still may be some kind of continuity beyond the grave.

However, Hardy's ghosts are not generally as docile and unobtrusive as those occupying the garden seat. Indeed on certain occasions they rise up from their graves and make their presences felt in an almost palpable way. Biblical, mythical, and folkloric sources all contribute to the poet's imagination on these occasions. Halloween, or more properly, All Hallow, or All Saints' Even, was a favorite time for Hardy. In a letter to Florence Hennicker dated October 31, 1920, he expresses his fondness for "this mysterious eve of saintly ghosts," as well as for All Souls, the following day traditionally devoted to easing souls out of purgatory (Collected Letters, Vol. 6: 44-5). One of the poems commemorating these holidays is the amusing "I Rose Up as My Custom Is" (CP, 311), which is, in keeping with the playful nature of this holiday, a tongue-in-cheek apologia for his own shortcomings as a husband in view of his poetic vocation. It begins:

> I rose up as my custom is
> On the eve of All-Souls' day,
> And left my grave for an hour or so
> To call on those I used to know
> Before I passed away.

This poet, newly risen from the dead, goes to revisit the bedside of his former love, only to be told that she is far more content with her new husband, a philistine certainly, but a much more dependable provider than an impractical poet could ever be. She explains to him:

> 'You were a poet--quite the ideal
> That we all love awhile:
> But look at this man snoring here--
> He's no romantic chanticleer,
> Yet keeps me in good style.

The ghost's words, as he slinks away abashed, conjure up all the spooky merriment of the season, even though one may wince a little at this phantom poet's heavy-handed pun:

> Her words benumbed my fond faint ghost;
> The nightmares neighed from their stalls,
> The vampires screeched, the harpies flew,
> And under dim dawn I withdrew
> To Death's inviolate halls.

A far different Hardy, one Harold Bloom calls the "visionary skeptic," emerges in another poem about All Souls' Eve, "A Night of Questionings" (CP, 696), a poem which echoes some of the cool, mystical beauty of Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." In A Map of Misreading Bloom has argued at length that Shelley is Hardy's true poetic father, and that even though the two poets appear completely dissimilar on the surface, Hardy owes many of his "ecstatic breakthroughs" to the influence of this earlier poet (11-22).

Hardy's deep reverence for Shelley, the poet and the man, is clearly borne out in his autobiography, where he describes a number of occasions on which he "impinged on the penumbra of the poet he loved" (134). The first of these occurred when, as a child traveling with his mother, he stayed at the same inn where romantic meetings between Shelley and Mary Godwin once took place. Later, as an adult, he made pilgrimages to the Godwin house where the couple first met (44), to the church where they married (327), to their haunts in Rome (200-1), to each of their grave sites, and, late in life, to the Shelley Memorial at Oxford (454).

Bloom postulates that a strong poet, like Hardy, cannot choose the poet under whose influence he falls. Instead the precursor, and certain of his poems, choose the ephebe whether he wills it or not (12). However the strong poet's "[i]nitial love for the precursor's poetry is transformed rapidly enough into revisionary strife," which is essential if the younger poet is to emerge as an original voice (10).

As he willfully misperceives and rewrites his father, any stylistic similarity between the two may be totally lost (20). This is certainly true of Shelley and Hardy.

In an entry listing "Books read or pieces looked at this year, (1887-88)", amid general references to such great poets as Milton, Dante, Homer, and Virgil, Hardy singles out "Ode to the West Wind" from all the rest of Shelley's poetry (L&W, 212). According to Bloom, it was this poem in particular that chose Hardy, "the way that starlight flows where it flows, gratuitously" (12), and "A Night of Questionings" does indeed show subtle correspondences to Shelley's ode. It opens with the lines:

> On the eve of All-Souls' Day
> I heard the dead men say
> Who lie by the tottering tower,
> To the dark and doubling wind
> At the midnight's turning hour,
> When other speech has thinned:
> 'What of the world now?'

As the poem progresses other groups of dead men, some poor, some rich, some cut off in sudden violence, pose the same question to the wind, seeking reassurance that the world has changed for the better since they left it. The wind replies enigmatically, nothing has really changed: "Men have not shown, / . . . / More lovely deeds and true / . . . / Or that they purer grow, / Or ever will I trow!--/ No more I know."

One of the similarities between Hardy's poem and Shelley's ode is the incantational quality as, in each case, the wind is appealed to as a visionary force, possessing an overview of things to come. Another is the "deep autumnal tone" elicited in each poem as the wind signals the dying of the old year. Thirdly, both poems present an analogous vision of the influence of the wind on nature, incorporating images on land, at sea, and in sunken worlds asleep under the sea. Yet the poems differ sharply in the message they convey. Shelley, who identifies the autumn wind with his own

fading poetic power, sees joyous hope for its rebirth, symbolized by the expectation of a returning spring. Hardy's vision of the future, however, is far more guarded. Instead of promising a coming enlightenment, the wind in his poem replies to its questioners that men will probably continue to do both good and evil deeds in approximately the same ratio that they have always done since time began. If Bloom's theory is valid, then it is no wonder that this poem, in spite of its Shelleyan reverberations, is uniquely, and unmistakably Hardy's own creation.

While the dead men, awaking on the Eve of All Soul's Day, in "A Night of Questionings" are curious about the state of the world in general, the ghosts who rise from the grave on New Year's Eve in "Spectres That Grieve" (CP, 268), have far more personal issues at stake. They return to seek redress for the misrepresentation they believe they have suffered in life. Interestingly, these "slighted visitants" impress the reader with their substance far more sharply than many of Hardy's ghosts. Not only do they actually communicate as they "lip" their grievances, they also display themselves in a recognizable, if ephemeral, physical form. The poet describes how these "Speakers":

> . . . sundry phantoms of the gone,
> Had risen like filmy flames of phosphor dye,
> As if the palest of sheet lightnings shone
> From the sward near me, as from a nether sky.

This near-corporeality is also an attribute of the ghosts winging homewards in "the Souls of the Slain" (CP, 62), probably Hardy's most protracted and complex treatment of the ghostly theme. These are the ghosts of soldiers who have died in the Boer War. As they near the speaker of the poem the sound of their approach resembles a "whirr, as of wings / Waved by mighty-vanned flies, / Or by night-moths of measureless size." Then gradually they become fleetingly visible as he recognizes a "dim-discerned train / Of sprites without mould, / Frameless souls none might touch or might

hold." Even though these ghosts are barely supraliminal their presences, weighted further by the words "mighty-vanned" and "measureless," seem weirdly and ominously real.

Dennis Taylor has remarked upon the "grotesque" nature of much of Hardy's ghost poetry, a characteristic he attributes to the influence of the Gothic novel in which ghosts are an indispensable "stage property." Taylor goes so far as to see certain poems as the expression of Hardy's wish for "apocalyptic power to raise the dead" (Hardy's Poetry, 108-10), and in these instances reality and imagination, the material world and the ghostly spirit world, fuse in such a way that each of them becomes grossly distorted. Taylor chooses "A Merrymaking in Question" (CP, 398) as one example of this phenomenon:

> 'I will get a new string for my fiddle,
> And call to the neighbours to come,
> And partners shall dance down the middle
> Until the old pewter-wares hum:
> And we'll sip the mead, cyder, and rum!'
>
> From the night came the oddest of answers:
> A hollow wind, like a bassoon,
> And headstones all ranged up as dancers,
> And cypresses droning a croon,
> And gurgoyles that mouthed to the tune.

The lilting anapests of the first stanza, connoting the galloping rhythm of the dancers feet, carry over into the second where they palely echo in a dance of death which Taylor believes may derive from Hardy's familiarity with William Strang's etching "Danse Macabre" (Hardy's Poetry, 110). In his notebooks Hardy comments on this particular work:

> The ballet of skeleton monks on stilts has no intruders to upset its fantastic logic and macabre sportiveness. Bones prances by Bones, and Deadhead whispers Deadhead in a natural nightmare way (Literary Notebooks 2: 31).

The oxymoronic terms which Hardy uses here, "fantastic logic," "macabre sportiveness," and "natural nightmare," could be aptly applied to "A Merrymaking in Question," with one element of each term applying to each stanza in the poem. In the first place, the words "logic," "natural," and "sportiveness" automatically harmonize with stanza one, and its joyous invitation to the dance of life, solidly taking place in the real world, where the fact that the laws of physics can be counted on to prevail is a cause for celebration. "Fantastic," "macabre," and "nightmare," on the other hand are in perfect tune with stanza two, with its answering death dance in the world of the imagination, where nature goes berserk, and inanimate objects come grotesquely to life. The poem itself is, in effect, an extended oxymoron, which tries to encompass what Horace calls "the jarring harmony of things" (Epistulae, I: 12.19). In this case the seeming irreconcilables of life and death are juxtaposed, and an eerie fusion of the two takes place, as stanza one, embodying the particular minutae of the human world, with its fiddle strings and neighborly dancing and drinking, is aligned with death, the great universal theme of stanza two. As meaning oscillates between life and death the distinction between the two states blurs, and death begins to mimic life. Yet ultimately the hegemony of neither state is established. The headstones dancing to the wind's tune are as nonchalantly amoral as the human dancers. How different they are from the participants in Tennyson's dance of death in "The Vision of Sin" who epitomize pure evil. Hardy, typically, is loath to make this kind of moral statement. To him the presence of evil, suffering, and death in the world is more probably attributable to what he terms "Crass Casualty," in other words; "the Cause of Things . . . which neither good nor evil knows," than to the deliberate malevolence of gods or men (Collected Letters, Vol. 6: 54). At no point does he claim to hold the key to the mysteries of life and death, he is merely aware that there is an intimate

relationship between the two. In one of his more somber poems, "Nature's Questioning" (CP, 43), he makes this admission:

> . . . . No answerer I. . . .
> Meanwhile the winds and rains,
> And Earth's old glooms and pains
> Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbours nigh.

The concept of the proximity of life and death appears at times in poems having a bearing on Hardy's personal life. "A January Night" (CP, 400), is a case in point. In it, the wintry night with its smiting rain, snarling wind, and writhing ivy-shoots, bodes " . . . some hid dread afoot / That we cannot trace." The final stanza introduces the eerie ghost of that fear:

> Is it the spirit astray
> Of the man at the house below
> Whose coffin they took in today?
> We do not know.

Hardy explains that this poem relates to a time when he and his wife Emma first began to feel that "[t]here had passed away a glory from the earth." It was then "that their troubles began" (L&W, 128). The straying spirit in this poem, then, evidently symbolizes their deteriorating marriage.

In certain somber moods Hardy likes to think of himself as already a ghost. For example, in "He Revisits His First School" (CP, 462), describing his physical presence there after so many years as "awkward, unseemly almost," he maintains: "I should not have shown in the flesh, / I ought to have gone as a ghost." In this way, he could have observed the scene without the discomfiture of exposing himself as the enfeebled, time-worn man he had become.

At another time he wrote, that after having attempted many methods of discovering the "value of life," he had come to the conclusion that:

> If there is any way of getting a melancholy satisfaction out of life it lies in dying, so to speak, before one is out of the flesh; by which I mean putting on the manners of ghosts, wandering in their haunts and taking their views of surrounding things. To think of life as passing away is a sadness; to think of it as past is at least tolerable. Hence even when I enter into a room to pay a simple morning call I have unconsciously the habit of regarding the scene as if I were a spectre not solid enough to influence my environment, only fit to behold, and say, as another spectre said: "Peace be unto you" (L&W, 218).

The way in which life and death are conflated in this passage is complex if not paradoxical. Hardy is seemingly saying that, by acting as one already dead, one can deny the knowledge that life is transient and death inevitable. Yet merely wishing to deny these realities is to affirm life as a thing of value. Furthermore, the ironic allusion to the risen Christ as "another spectre," while it undercuts the concept of a literal resurrection after death, at the same time allows for something like it, if only in ghostly shape. Here, as all throughout Hardy's poetry, eros and thanatos continually fuse and separate until it is difficult to distinguish between these two powerful forces. Once again the concept is reinforced that life and death--the particular and the universal--are not only "Neighbours nigh", but are virtually inseparable when the microscopic and the telescopic visions of reality are superimposed.

CHAPTER 3

The Triple Obsession: Death, Memory, and Time

While I have chosen only two major strands to follow from the multitude woven into Hardy's poetry, other critics have placed the emphasis on a different combination of strands. Take for example R. P. Blackmur's observation that some of Hardy's most successful poetry results "when his triple obsession with death, memory, and time makes by mutual absorption something of a trinity" (11). It is true that these three elements appear so consistently, and with such compelling effect, that to call them an obsession is not an overstatement. In this chapter I would like to juxtapose my themes of death and the afterlife and the other two themes in Blackmur's triad, time and memory, to demonstrate how closely his strands and mine are intertwined. Beginning with some general observations about the nature of time I will attempt to illustrate its inseparability from death. Then I will postulate two more versions of the Hardyan afterlife, one linked to time and the other to memory.

A powerful curiosity about the nature of time was certainly not limited to Hardy during the nineteenth century. In fact a number of observers have pointed out that Victorians in general were obsessed with the concept of time. In The Finer Optic Carol Christ attributes this preoccupation to the rate of change, unprecedented in history, taking place during the industrial revolution. She maintains that this particular era "was the first to become self-conscious about its own modernity." Victorians at this time began experiencing a new awareness of the differences between the various historical epochs, and subsequently began to

perceive themselves as a generation distinct from any in the past (89).

Jerome Buckley notes that "many modern attitudes toward the whole temporal process" had their origin in nineteenth-century England. Essentially new, for example, was the "notion of public time, or history, as the medium of organic growth and fundamental change, rather than simply additive succession" (1-5). Buckley observes that a "sense of history, of perpetually changeful public time, was central to the intellectual life of the nineteenth century." However, while this concept of rapid public change meant progress, or change for the better to some, to others it meant change for the worse, or a slide into decadence. In any case, few were able to view this phenomenon with calmness and detachment (12-13). Equally disturbing was the conflict between scientific notions of time, and human time as experienced in the lives of individuals. Instead of representing a fixed, measurable commodity, Buckley points out that "private time is arbitrary, relative in quality to the passing personal emotion, continuous, yet variable in tempo--now fast, now slow" (7).

Hans Meyerhoff, who also describes the irreconcilable differences between private time in human experience and scientific public time as it is measured in nature, goes further to claim that time in literature reflects all the subjective and psychological variance of the former (4). For Proust, for example, time is elastic (14), expanding and contracting as memory directs it.

In March of 1875 Hardy received an unusual summons from his friend and publisher Leslie Stephen requesting that he witness the latter's legal renunciation of holy orders. Hardy describes what followed on that occasion:

> The deed was executed with due formality. Our conversation then turned upon theologies decayed and defunct, the origin of things, the constitution

> of matter, the unreality of time, and kindred subjects. (L&W, 108-9)

"The 'unreality of time'! What can this mean?" J. Hillis Miller exclaims. "Can a man so preoccupied in his poems and fiction . . . with the remorseless passage of time . . . have seriously entertained such an idea?" (Distance and Desire, 228). The truth is, of course, this concept of time's unreality, at least as old as the paradoxes of Zeno, has occupied thinkers throughout the centuries.

St. Augustine, puzzling over the enigma of time in book XI of Confessions, raises the question "What then is time?" He concedes finally: "I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled." Yet in spite of his dilemma the patriarch does succeed in advancing an hypothesis which would indeed seem to abolish time. A modern writer, Louise Heath, has given perhaps the most concise and lucid explanation of his argument:

> The nature of time is such that when the present is, the past has been and is no longer, the future will be, but is not yet, while the present which is turns out on analysis to be not a part of time but only the boundary between past and future. (199)

One can imagine that it was speculations of this nature about the riddle of time which occupied Hardy and Stephen on the night in question.

Much later in life Hardy was to encounter Einstein's theory of relativity with its bewildering "amalgamation of time and space into one four-dimensional continuum" (Literary Notebooks, 2: 228). In 1919, writing to a friend, he confided his difficulty in grasping the idea of relativity, adding wryly: "after what [Einstein] says the universe seems to be getting too comic for words." (Selected Letters, 338). Revolutionary scientific theories such as

this prompted the light-hearted iconoclasm of "Drinking Song" (CP, 896), part of which reads:

> And now comes Einstein with a notion -
> Not yet quite clear
> To many here -
> That's There's no time, no space, no motion,
> Nor rathe nor late,
> Nor square nor straight,
> But just a sort of bending-ocean.

Paradoxically enough time was, for the most part, very real and anything but a matter for flippancy, to Hardy. Perhaps this ambivalence is explained in part by Kenneth Marsden's statement that "it is common property that Hardy was an unsystematic thinker and quite capable of holding mutually contradictory views" (78-9)

Another entry in the Literary Notebooks shows that the poet was actually acutely concerned with time, and especially with the fact that, in human experience, it is a "one-way" phenomenon (247). As Meyerhoff observes, time is indeed an irreversible process. It runs only in one direction, and just as eggs cannot be unscrambled time cannot be turned backward. The chilling corollary to this fact is the realization that life is fleeting, and time tends remorselessly toward death (64-6). Meyerhoff concludes:

> It is no wonder, then, that this explanation leaves something to be desired, or is thought to be inadequate . . . It is no wonder, either, that this quality of time--the transitoriness of life, time's inexorable march toward death--should have become the vested interest of poets, religious writers, and nonscientific, literary philosophers. (66)

Meyerhoff observes further that Christianity over the ages has emphasized the brevity of life and "the vanity of all human endeavor under the shadow of death." But at the same time it has offered deliverance from time's tyranny and the threat of mortality with its promise of life everlasting in the world to come. This is, sadly, no consolation to the

non-believer, to which fact the "pessimistic note of existential anguish and nihilistic despair" in so much modern literature attests. (69-73)

To Hardy as a non-believer the knowledge that time is irreversible is a particular cause for pessimism. Some observers, Marsden for one, believe him abnormally sensitive to the passage of time (79). In poem after poem time is depicted as the implacable enemy, steadily eroding away youth and beauty. "In a Eweleaze Near Weatherbury" (CP, 47), for example, describes this process with ruthless precision:

> Yet I note the little chisel
> Of Never-napping Time
> Defacing wan and grizzel
> The blazon of my prime.

Time here is depicted as a tradesman working away with ceaseless energy. Borrowing another image from the tool kit the poet next imagines Time exchanging his chisel for a bore.

> When at night he thinks me sleeping
> I feel him boring sly
> Within my bones, and heaping
> Quaintest pains for by-and-by.

As if this insidious boring and chipping away at youth and beauty were not enough, perhaps the cruelest irony of all is the fact that while time destroys the human body it may do nothing to quell the youthful longings of the soul trapped within as another poem so poignantly points out:

> I look into my glass
> And view my wasting skin,
> And say 'Would God it came to pass
> My heart had shrunk as thin!'
>
> For then, I, undistrest
> By hearts grown cold to me,
> Could lonely wait my endless rest
> With equanimity.
>
> But Time, to make me grieve,
> Part steals, lets part abide;
> And shakes this fragile frame at eve

With throbbings of noontide. (CP, 52)

Even though Hardy insisted in several prefaces to his volumes of poetry that poems such as this, written in the first person, were to be regarded largely as dramatic monologues spoken by different characters, "I Look Into My Glass" strikes the reader as emanating from a deeply felt personal experience. A journal entry dated October 18, 1892 tends to confirm this supposition:

> Hurt my tooth at breakfast-time. I look in the glass. Am conscious of the humiliating sorriness of my earthly tabernacle, and of the sad fact that the best of parents could do no better for me . . . Why should a man's mind have been thrown into such close, sad, sensational, inexplicable relations with such a precarious object as his own body! (L&W, 265)

Millgate sees in this statement "a strong suggestion of a recent rebuff from a younger woman," Possibly Hardy's illustrator Rosamund Tomson (Biography, 332). It is widely known that Hardy, eternally romantic, was particularly susceptible to the attractions of beautiful young women during his later years. Perhaps his "throbbings of noontide at eve" suggest a bond shared with the bird of "The Darkling Thrush" (CP, 119), who though "aged," "frail," "gaunt," "small," and "blast-beruffled" caroled on joyously like the virile young songbird he apparently still believed himself to be.

However the phrase "hearts grown cold to me" contains more than one level of meaning. Not only is time apt to cause hearts to cool to romantic love, it also chills the hearts of friends and loved ones when it snatches them away to the coldness of the grave. Hardy's melancholy confrontation with his mirror was made just a few days after attending Tennyson's funeral. Much more deeply painful was the depression he had suffered ever since his father's death earlier that year. Millgate records Hardy's sad realization

at that particular time in his life just how few people whom he could call "very old friends" the "ravages of time" had left him (Biography, 332). The final stanza of the poem, describing how Time "Part steals, lets part abide" may also have a deeper meaning than the obvious reference to the fact that the body ages yet youthful emotions persist. It may also describe, as do a number of poems, how friends are stolen away one by one by time and death, while the living remain to grieve them alone. "Looking Across" discussed earlier is one of these. Another is "The Five Students" (CP, 439), where, once again, the cumulative effect of the consecutive losses can be appreciated only by quoting the poem in full:

The sparrow dips in his wheel-rut bath,
The sun grows passionate-eyed,
And boils the dew to smoke by the paddock-path;
As strenuously we stride,-
Five of us; dark He, Fair He, dark She, fair She, I,
All beating by.

The air is shaken, the high-road hot,
Shadowless swoons the day,
The greens are sobered and cattle at rest; but not
We on our urgent way,-
Four of us; fair She, dark She, fair He, I, are there,
But one - elsewhere.

Autumn moulds the hard fruit mellow,
And forward still we press
Through moors, briar-meshed plantations, clay-pits yellow,
As in the spring hours - yes,
Three of us; Fair He, fair She, I, as heretofore,
But - fallen one more.

The leaf drops: earthworms draw it in
At night-time noiselessly,
The fingers of birch and beech are skeleton-thin,
And yet on the beat are we, -
Two of us; fair She, I. But no more left to go
The track we know.

Icicles tag the church-aisle leads,
The flag-rope gibbers hoarse,
The home-bound foot-folk wrap their snow-flaked heads,
Yet I still stalk the course -
One of us. . . . Dark and fair He, Dark and fair She, gone:
The rest - anon.

This poem, one of Hardy's finest, has kept source-seekers guessing about the real-life identities of the five students. Hardy himself, presumably, would be the speaker of the poem because he names his close friend Horace Moule as one of the other four (L&W, 434). However speculations of such a personal nature are not particularly relevant given the universality of the theme. Hardy achieves this universality in part by equating life with a journey. But he brings new freshness and depth to this age-old metaphor by combining within the poem five lines of progression, each of which follows a step-by-step formula. In the first place this is a journey whose course proceeds gradually across a spatial landscape, from path, to high road, past a variety of specific landmarks. But it is also a journey through time on two separate levels, the first diurnal, moving from morning through noon to night, the second annual, going through the four seasons of the year. Trevor Johnson has discovered another graduated process achieved by the skillful manipulation of prosody. This is the slacking off of the walkers' pace little by little as the poem moves from the "springing rhythm which suggests optimism" at the beginning of the poem to the heavy dragging rhythm at the end, culminating in the monosyllabic "I still stalk the course" which compels the reader to slow down (Thomas Hardy, 65). Finally, the most compelling of all these step-by step processes is the dropping away in number of the students. All of these graduated processes converge at the end. The course has been traversed, day has turned to night, spring to winter, and the pace of the lone survivor has slowed. Now it only remains for him to wait for time to take its final toll at his own death.

Another poem, "Under High-Stoy Hill" (CP, 760), although lighter in tone and less-complex in composition, is still a very effective treatment of the same subject matter:

Four climbed High-Stoy from Ivelwards,
Where hedge meets hedge, and cart-ruts wind,
Chattering like birds,
And knowing not what lay behind.

We laughed beneath the moonlight blink,
Said supper would be to our mind,
And did not think
Of Time, and what might lie behind....

The moon still meets that tree-tipped height,
The road - as then - still trails inclined;
But since that night
We have well learnt what lay behind!

For all of the four then climbing here
But one are ghosts, and he brow-lined;
With him they fare,
Yet speak not of what lies behind.

In this case a stage by stage progression from innocence to experience parallels the reduction in number of the participants in the action. In the first stanza the four climbers set out in blissful ignorance of their own mortality. In the second stanza, however, where the element of Time is introduced mortality is implicit but the four choose not to think about it. Instead they think of supper, or in other words, they seize the pleasurable moment. The third and final stanzas move the action from the past into the present. Now the lone figure, soon to join his mute, ghostly companions, is fully cognizant of what awaits him behind Time.

In one of his later poems, "Going and Staying" (CP, 528), Hardy takes the substance of that querulous early line: "But Time, to make me grieve, / Part steals, lets part abide;" and gives it in a gentler, more meditative interpretation:

I

The moving sun-shapes on the spray,
The sparkles where the brook was flowing;
Pink faces, plightings, moonlit May,
These were the things we wished would stay;
But they were going.

II
Seasons of blankness as of snow,
The silent bleed of a world decaying,
The moan of multitudes in woe,
These are the things we wished would go;
But they were staying.

III
Then we looked closelier at Time,
And saw his ghostly arms revolving
To sweep off woeful things with prime,
Things sinister with things sublime
Alike dissolving.

This is a poem whose delicacy and brevity conceal the subtlety of its composition. For example, stanzas one and two are exact inversions of each other, both topically and technically. In stanza one the good things of life are being snatched away, while in stanza two the bad things are permitted to remain. Their rhyme schemes reinforce this inversion. If only the vocalics of the rhyming words were considered they would read

a b a a b

and

b a b b a

respectively. However this is not entirely accurate because each stanza contains lines with both masculine and feminine endings. Here too the pattern is reversed. In stanza one the "a" rhyme is used for the masculine endings, "spray," "May," and "stay," while the "b" rhyme is used for the feminine "flowing" and "going." Conversely, in stanza two, "b" is used for "snow," "woe," and "go," and "a" for "decaying" and "staying." Stanza three, which adopts other rhymes, is, topically, a synthesis of the first two. On closer examination Time does not remove only the good things, nor does it leave behind only the bad. Like some diabolical clock its hands sweep away the good and the bad alike.

Regarded from another angle this poem is a nearly perfect example of Hardy's double vision inspiring one of his

finer small poems. In stanza one he views the world at close quarters in all its delightful particularity. This is a beautiful world suffused with sunlight, moonlight, and sparkling water. It is also a human world, optimistic, glowing with happiness, youth, and love. Stanza two then moves out to the wide, universal overview, where grim scenes of decaying worlds and moaning multitudes evoke the nadir of pessimism. The third stanza synthesizes these two views. Neither the unalloyed optimism elicited by the imagery in stanza one, nor the gloom projected in stanza two, represents the whole picture. But when the two views are superimposed the true three-dimensional image of life is revealed. And it is at their core of commonality, where the two views overlap, that the real point of the poem lies. Time dissolves all things alike, both the sinister and the sublime.

Very late in life Hardy shows signs of having come to terms at last with Time and its inevitable consequences. His penultimate volume of poems, appearing in 1925 just three years before his death, opens with the brief, enigmatic lyric "Waiting Both" (CP, 663):

> A star looks down at me,
> And says: 'Here I and you
> Stand, each in our degree:
> What do you mean to do, -
> Mean to do?'
>
> I say: 'For all I know,
> Wait and let Time go by,
> Till my change come.' - 'Just so,'
> The star says: 'So mean I: -
> So mean I.'

The life-span of a star may be billions of years, compared to which a mortal's life is brief and fleeting indeed. Yet despite their vast discrepancy in "degree" both poet and star recognize their utter powerlessness against the advance of time. There is nothing more to do then than simply to await one's change with stoic acceptance.

But if this poem implies a resignation attained during Hardy's closing years it is not typical of the bulk of his work where his life-long quarrel with Time, and his continuing wish to escape from its strictures are the norm. A passage entered into his journal at the age of forty seven aptly demonstrates this desire:

> July 14. It is the on-going--i.e., the 'becoming'--of the world that produces its sadness. if the world stood still at a felicitous moment there would be no sadness in it. The sun and the moon standing still on Ajalon was not a catastrophe for Israel, but a type of Paradise. (L&W, 210)

The "becoming" here may allude to Plato's Timaeus, which defines "the sphere of the Becoming" as the created cosmos. Plato postulates that the universe is a mere copy of an original model which he calls "That which is existent always and has no becoming." This model exists outside of time, in eternity, and time only came into being with the making of the copy, when God created the sun, moon, and stars to mark day and night, the month, and the year.

So the "felicitous moment" Hardy envisions implies escaping from the flux of time into eternity, and eternity, as Meyerhoff points out, does not mean infinite time, but timelessness, or the absence of time (54). Mankind's grasp of the concept of eternity has always been elusive. Yet while, in Keats phraseology, it is an idea calculated to tease us out of thought, we have never ceased to contemplate it with awe. Somewhat surprisingly St. Augustine's Hebraic explanation of eternity bears some interesting similarities to Plato's Hellenic model. Both believe that God exists in an eternity where one event does not follow another, but all events exist simultaneously. Moreover both believe that time was non-existent until it was created by God concurrently with the creation of the universe. These assumptions were accepted by the Christian church down through the ages. It was not until the nineteenth century, with its general

questioning of many fundamental religious beliefs, that the credibility of patristic notions about eternity were seriously challenged. And it was not merely within a religious context that the "dimension of eternity" was called into question at that time according to Carol Christ. She attributes its collapse further to an overall weakening of received philosophical verities, as well as to unsettling shifts in direction occurring in certain social and political systems theretofore considered solidly fixed. "Time thus came to be experienced as constant change totally enclosing all of human experience" (107).

Yet as Buckley observes, the Romantics and the Victorians who followed them still felt a need to believe "with Shelley that the true poet participated in the infinite and the eternal." But as eternity grew more and more secularized it became "correspondingly personal and psychological" (138-41). In other words many poets now looked within themselves for something approaching a feeling of timelessness and perdurability. Some found it in certain rare moments of heightened sensibility. Pater called them "exquisite pauses in time," and one can assume these moments were akin to Wordsworth's "spots of time" and Joyce's "epiphanies" (Buckley, 146). Georges Poulet records, at length, a related experience undergone periodically by Rousseau, which he could induce by exercising an austere asceticism. At these times "the feeling of the self and pure sensation" merged to create what he called the true "eternal moment" (171). Poulet describes similar states of heightened awareness and joy experienced by Flaubert which he called "grand days in the sun." During these episodes he felt both a feeling of oneness with the universe and the presence of all eternity in a moment of time (225).

Hardy would probably choose his own term "Moments of Vision" for those priceless experiences which seem to suspend and transcend time. There are a number of poems in which he seems to detach himself from the temporal realm to

take a Godlike overview in which all time, past, present, and future, appears to exist concurrently. According to Miller this detached perspective "spatializes time, freezes it into a fixed shape" (Distance and Desire, 197). In poems belonging to this category every single event that ever has occurred, is occurring, or will occur, is fixed irrevocably in place in eternity. "To Meet or Otherwise" (CP, 251) describes how an occurrence so seemingly unimportant in the vast panorama of history as a lovers' meeting will remain eternally afloat somewhere in the cosmos. Its last two stanzas read:

> By briefest meeting something sure is won;
> It will have been:
> Nor God nor demon can undo the done,
> Unsight the seen,
> Make muted music be as unbegun,
> Though things terrene
> Groan in their bondage till oblivion supervene.
>
> So, to the one long-sweeping symphony
> From times remote
> Till now, of human tenderness, shall we
> Supply one note,
> Small and untraced, yet that will ever be
> Somewhere afloat
> Amid the spheres, as part of sick life's antidote.

Musical imagery appears again in the poem "In a Museum" (CP, 358), where the song of bird fossilized eons ago, mingles with the sweet singing of a contralto voice heard only the night before, to become part of the "Full-fugued song of the universe unending." And yet another poem (CP, 358) relates how a lover's kiss once given can never die, but instead it will continue eternally "Travelling aethereal rounds / Far from earth's bounds / In the infinite."

If relatively inconsequential events such as these become such an irradicable part of nature to Hardy it is not surprising that he should expand the concept further to fashion from it yet one more version of his poetic afterlife. In fact there are several poems in which he preserves the

dead in just this way, depicting them merging with the primordial forces of nature to be rolled around for ever in the infinity of space. One of these, "He Prefers Her Earthly" (CP, 442), speaks of a dead loved-one now dwelling in the "glory-show" of the "after-sunset," changed from her "mortal mould . . . to a firmament-riding earthless essence."

Late in life, while grappling with Einstein's revolutionary physics, Hardy almost seems to have convinced himself that this kind of permanence was a valid way to immortalize his first wife and his parents according to a Journal entry of 1923:

> June 10 Relativity: That things and events always were, are, and will be (e.g. Emma, Mother and Father are still living in the past). (L&W, 453)

Although Hardy's understanding of Einstein's theory of relativity was probably less than perfect, his fascination with it inspired the companion poems "The Absolute Explains" (CP, 722) and "So Time" (CP, 723). The first of these is a loose, rather garrulous explanation by the Absolute (presumably synonymous with the Immanent Will) of the impact on Time of the discovery of the Fourth Dimension. Once again life is compared to a journey. However in this case it is made at night by a traveler whose vision is confined to the portion of the highway illuminated by the "frail ray" of his lantern. This area corresponds to the "Present." Yet the unseen portion of the road lying behind him which represents the past remains vibrantly extant in every detail. There long-dead flowers remain "fadeless" and fixed in bloom along with all the pains and pleasures experienced in the past in their original particularity and actuality. The traveler is reassured that although his sweetheart is dead she remains there:

> As pleasing-pure as erst she was,
> Though you think she lies yon,

Graved, glow all gone.

While the Absolute is reluctant to reveal the future, or the road lying ahead, the traveler is informed that it exists just as surely as the part already traveled. The discovery of the Fourth Dimension, therefore, brings with it the knowledge that

> . . . Time is toothless, seen all through;
> The Present, that men but see,
> Is Phasmal: since in a sane purview
> All things are shaped to be
> Eternally.

"So Time" according to its subtitle is a resumption of the same thought. However its tautness and brevity make it an even more effective treatment of the subject. If the first of its two stanzas effectually dethrones and defangs the autocratic old enemy Time the second one offers the consolation of a Hardyan afterlife in eternity:

> Young, old,
> Passioned, cold,
> all the loved-lost thus
> Are beings continuous,
> In dateless dure abiding,
> Over the present striding
> With placid permanence
> That knows not transience:
> Firm in the Vast,
> First, last;
> Afar, yet close to us.

If, as Miller suggests, Hardy's transformation of the dead into eternal essences involves taking a wide, universal view of reality (Distance and Desire, 197), he creates another kind of afterlife when, as is generally the case in his various versions of life after death, he adopts the narrow, more human, perspective. This next version, coincidentally, returns us to the third term in Blackmur's trinity, "memory." Miller sees similarities between Hardy's contention that nothing is ever lost, and both De Quincey's

palimpsest theory and Yeats Anima Mundi. De Quincey saw memory in terms of a palimpsest upon which every experience of one's life remains permanently imprinted in layers in one's brain. Yeats, on the other hand, posited the notion of the Anima Mundi, the great world memory in which all events continually reenact themselves in the Void. Yet it is only by individuals actively recollecting these thoughts, emotions and experiences that they can be resurrected from the palimpsest or plucked out of the Anima Mundi to be momentarily brought back to life in time (Distance and Desire, 231) Similarly, Hardy's dead loved ones, continuing as timeless essences in space, must be actually reincarnated into the temporal realm by being remembered by the living.

Unquestionably memory was the key to inspiration in many of Hardy's finest poems, and his willingness to acknowledge his indebtedness to its potency is borne out by a statement he made quite late in life:

> I believe it would be said by people who knew me well that I have a faculty (possibly not uncommon) for burying an emotion in my heart or brain for forty years, and exhuming it at the end of that time as fresh as when interred. (L&W, 405)

Most critics would agree that the "Poems of 1912-13" are Hardy's supreme expression of the power of memory to bring the dead back to life. I would like, however, at this point to draw attention to a number of poems in which persons other than Emma Hardy enjoy an afterlife in the memory of the living. One of these is Louisa Harding, a young woman whom Hardy loved from a distance as a youth (Biography, 58). She makes an appearance along with "the elect one," his dead wife, in the poem "Louie" (CP, 739)

> I am forgetting Louie the buoyant;
> Why not raise her phantom too,
> Here in daylight
> With the elect one's?
> She will never thrust the foremost figure out of view!

Mid this heat, in gauzy muslin
See I Louie's life-lit brow
Here in daylight
By the elect one's. -
Long two strangers they and far apart; such neighbours now!

The shyness which had prevented any relationship with Louisa from developing "even to the point of speech" caused Hardy life-long regret, according to his biographer Millgate. And although they never met in later life, he idealized her memory, even visiting her grave in Stinsford churchyard when she died less than a year after his wife (58-9). By refusing to forget her in this poem he necromantically brings her back to life.

Another "lost prize" whom Hardy revivifies through the power of memory is his cousin Tryphena Sparks in the poem "Thoughts of Phena: At News of Her Death" (CP, 38). He begins by rueing the fact that he has no tangible relic to remember her by: "Not a line of her writing have I / Not a thread of her hair." What he does retain, however, is his memory of her:

Thus I do but the phantom retain
Of the maiden of yore
As my relic; yet haply the best of her - fined in my brain
It may be the more
That no line of her writing have I,
Nor a thread of her hair,
No mark of her late time as dame in her dwelling, whereby
I may picture her there.

Because memory is selective the poet can choose to keep the best of her alive, distilled in his brain to the essence of the young woman he once loved. And this may be better in the long-run than to be reminded by some physical object of the matronly "dame in her dwelling," married to another man, that she was when she died. Meyerhoff sheds light on this phenomenon by pointing out that although memory is a temporal occurrence it shares two characteristics with eternity. In the first place a recollection is freed from the date when the event which triggered it actually took place. And as it

can "burst into consciousness at any time or place" it becomes "a permanent or timeless possibility." Secondly, the remembered experience takes on the quality of an "eternal essence" which allows it to remain preserved in its original state (54-5). In this way Hardy can keep Tryphena eternally youthful, and she will live on as long as his memory of her exists.

Not only are the living capable of giving the dead an afterlife in this way however. They are actually obliged to do so according to "Her Immortality" (CP, 32). In this poem a former lover's thoughts of his dead sweetheart conjure up her ghost. In order to be reunited with her in death he contemplates suicide until she admonishes him:

> A Shade but in its mindful ones
> Has immortality;
> By living, me you keep alive,
> By dying you slay me.

Faced with this "fearsome responsibility" as Harold Orel describes it (The Final Years, 64), the lover realizes he must continue to endure the "bleak unrest" of his own unhappy life in order to extend her afterlife as long as possible. Of course in spite of its promise the word "immortality" in this poem is really quite ironic. Life in another's memory is not everlasting. It ceases at the moment of the other's death, or more sadly when the living forget their dead loved ones. The companion poem "His Immortality" (CP, 109) clearly demonstrates just how precarious this kind of continuance can be:

> I
>
> I saw a dead man's finer part
> Shining within each faithful heart
> Of those bereft. Then said I: 'This must be
> His immortality.'
>
> II
>
> I looked there as the seasons wore,

And still his soul continuously bore
A life in theirs. But less its shine excelled
Than when I next beheld.

III

His fellow-yearsmen passed, and then
In later hearts I looked for him again;
And found him - shrunk, alas! into a thin
And spectral manikin.

IV

Lastly I ask - now old and chill -
If aught of him remain unperished still;
And find, in me alone, a feeble spark,
Dying amid the dark.

This poem follows the pattern of "The Five Students" and those poems like it in which the action, in a series of connected steps, leads to a gradual diminution of some kind. In this case Hardy takes the metaphor of a shining light dimming by degrees to a "feeble spark" to represent the ebbing away of the dead man's life in the remembrance of others. He frequently ends poems of this kind on a note of ironic suspense by stopping just one step short of the inevitable outcome. For example one last student still stalks the course, or, as in this poem, a solitary friend keeps a vestigial spark of the dead man from perishing altogether.

The poem which Hardy places alongside of "His Immortality," however, "The To-Be Forgotten" (CP, 110), clearly delineates what takes place beyond that final step. In it the speaker, while visiting a graveyard, is startled by "a small sad sound" coming from the tombs surrounding him. He questions the dead souls about the reason for their unhappiness considering that they now are finally "screened from life's unrest." They respond that it is not the quietude of the grave that distresses them. It is the knowledge that they are soon to face their "future second death" when their memory among the living fades away entirely. While there are a few individuals so illustrious

that their memory never dies, these are ordinary men and women who have never aspired to fame, and who now foresee their tranquil afterlife coming to an end as, like myriads before them, they descend to a "deeper death" when they are forgotten by all. They complain:

> But what has been will be -
> First memory, then oblivion's swallowing sea;
> Like men foregone, shall we merge into those
> Whose story no one knows.

Citing the writings of a number of Hardy's contemporaries Marsden observes that "this theme of Immortality as Being Remembered with its corollary that death is essentially Being Forgotten" appears to have been a characteristic of nineteenth-century agnostic thought. He adds, however, that for Hardy this was not necessarily a plausible belief which he would predicate outside of his poetry. It was rather a myth useful for his creative purposes. Marsden maintains, furthermore, that Hardy is inconsistent in his various treatments of this theme (67-8). And it is true that the dismay of the "To-Be Forgotten" souls in this poem contrasts sharply with the yearning to "unbe" expressed in "Tess's Lament" and the many other poems extolling the merits of oblivion. But rather than implying a contradiction in Hardy's personal feelings, these conflicting points of view may simply demonstrate his adroitness at creating fictional characters who would disagree about the desirability of being remembered after death.

Among the poetry concerned with the correlative theme, that being forgotten equates with death, this diversity of opinion is reflected in the way the poems themselves vary so widely in tone and form. At one extreme is the decorous "Sapphic Fragment" (CP, 143), to which Hardy appends two grim but pertinent quotations, one from Omar Khayyám: Thou shalt - be Nothing," and the other from Shakespeare: "Tombless, with no remembrance." In a letter to Swinburne

Hardy stated that dissatisfaction with a number of earlier translations of Sappho's "Fragment 68" had prompted him to try his hand at composing one of his own (Selected Letters, 116). His version reads as follows:

> Dead shalt thou lie; and nought
> Be told of thee or thought,
> For thou hast plucked not of the Muses' tree:
> And even in Hades' halls
> Amidst thy fellow-thralls
> No friendly shade thy shade shall company!

Richard Little Purdy, in his bibliographic study of Hardy's works, notes an erased reference in the manuscript of this poem to Ecclesiastes IX: 5, which states of the dead, "[n]either have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten (116). These various allusions and quotations, classical, biblical, Oriental, and Occidental, which Hardy collocates in and around this poem amply illustrate the global nature of its theme.

On a far less weighty note however is "Ah, Are you Digging on My Grave?" (CP, 269). This is another of those "sequential" poems which like "His Immortality" descend in a series of steps to an "ironic reversal of expectation" according to Samuel Hynes. The speaker, a dead woman in this case, discovers that she has been forgotten in turn by her lover, her family, her enemy, and finally her faithful dog. Yet Hynes, like Marsden, censures Hardy's inconsistency, pointing out that the poem's assertion "that no affection survives death" is flatly contradicted in numerous other Hardyan poems, notably those to his first wife, and even those to his dead pets (53).

An even slighter poem, "Why She Moved House: The Dog Muses" (CP, 806), almost a miniature version of the last poem, repeats its ironic theme.

> Why she moved house, without a word,
> I cannot understand;
> She'd mirrors, flowers, she'd book and bird,
> And callers in a band.

And where she is she gets no sun,
  No flowers, no book, no glass;
Of callers I am the only one,
  And I but pause and pass.

Here again, the dog's brief perfunctory visits to the dead woman's grave are all that prevent her descent into a deeper second death among the forgotten.

From the satire and whimsy of these last two poems Hardy turns to the weirdly supernatural in "The Clock of the Years" (CP, 481). Here the speaker, in a rash attempt to bring his dead love back to life, makes a Faustian bargain with a spirit who claims the power to make time run backwards. There is one stumbling block, however. He will not guarantee to stop the clock at any particular point. Taking the gamble anyway the speaker is overjoyed when his sweetheart is conjured up before him. Then as the clock whirls backward she grows younger and younger until she becomes the fresh young girl he had first known. But the spirit refuses his plea to stop time there, and she regresses through childhood, babyhood, and finally vanishes to "nought at all." It is as if she had never existed. While lamenting that he can now no longer even keep her alive in his memory, the rueful lover is reminded that the reckless attempt to meddle with the course of nature was entirely his own decision:

'Better,' I plained,
'She were dead as before! The memory of her
Had lived in me; but it cannot now!'
And coldly his voice:
'It was your choice
To mar the ordained.'

Distinctly different again, "The Souls of the Slain" (CP, 62), almost defies classification, although Barton R. Friedman is probably justified in calling it a dream vision because of the surrealism of the scene described by its speaker. The phantoms of a group of dead soldiers winging

home from the war meet a "senior soul-flame" who has preceded them, and discovered how their reputations stand among the living folk at home. At first they are disappointed to learn that it is not their heroism in battle that is remembered, but rather their homely, commonplace "deeds of fondness or fret," performed while they were still at home, that live on "fresh as new" in the minds of their loved ones. This intelligence causes the ghosts to separate into two groups. Those who are remembered lovingly continue on home anyway, only too happy to live on in the thoughts of others, but those remembered with bitterness turn back:

> And, towering to seaward in legions,
> They paused at a spot
> Overbending the Race -
> That engulphing, ghast, sinister place -
> Whither headlong they plunged, to the fathomless regions
> Of myriads forgot.

By plunging into the sea of oblivion these ghosts align themselves with those, who like Tess, wish to be totally forgotten. The different attitudes of these two groups concerning the wisdom of experiencing an afterlife in the memory of others should answer critics like Marsden and Hynes who accuse Hardy of inconsistency on the subject. It depends entirely on whether those memories are good or bad. In any case, for all except the very famous this is a limited kind of life after death, yet, stemming as it does from Hardy's close-up view of reality, it is a warmly human one concerned with the love of individuals for one another. On the other hand the afterlife emanating from his wide, universal perspective, where the dead exist eternally as rarefied essences in the Void, is somehow remote and cold. But by superimposing the two views the dead can have the best of both, for while one affords them immortality in a general sense, the other brings them back to life in a very personal and particular way, as they are plucked out of eternity and

brought back into time when the living remember them with love.

CHAPTER 4

Beyond the Memorial Afterlife

Hardy's concept of giving the dead a second life in the memory of the living ramifies and modulates into two very different groups of poems. The first of these probes the range of emotions experienced by the rememberers, while the second group depicts the latter, finding this kind of afterlife too ephemeral to be adequate, seeking to enshrine their dead loved ones more permanently in art or in substantive memorials of various kinds.

To study the first of these groups is to discover just how divergent are the ways in which the living remember the dead. Their reactions to the demise of another can range from the most profound grief, through denial, remorse, to apathy, relief, or even outright glee. The poems in this group amply demonstrate the plurality of human passions and the complexity of human relationships. Most moving are a number of poems in which Hardy manifests a rare sensitivity to the emotive complexion of a grieving woman. "Bereft" (CP, 157) is one of these. In the first stanza a widow juxtaposes the past and the future as she contrasts the way she expects to experience the start of an ordinary day now with the way she remembers how her days began when her husband was still alive. She follows this with a dirgelike refrain intoned in four shorter lines to create a type of bob and wheel effect:

> In the black winter morning
> No light will be struck near my eyes
> While the clock in the stairway is warning
> For five, when he used to rise.
> Leave the door unbarred,
> The clock unwound,
> Make my lone bed hard -
> Would 'twere underground!

The speaker's waking to the bleakness of the winter day symbolizes her awakening to the full realization of her loss. This initiates her subsequent wish for her own death. In the second stanza, however, the mood coloration shifts:

> When the summer dawns clearly,
> And the appletree-tops seem alight,
> Who will undraw the curtain and cheerly
> Call out that the morning is bright?

The beauty and clarity of the dawn in summer contrasts sharply with the dreariness of the winter morning in stanza one, yet in her grief she remains uncomforted by it. Stanzas three and four evoke memories of times in the past which were indeed comforting. They recall times when her solicitous spouse would come out to meet her and see her safely home in the dark after a day of separation, and they revive memories of the couple's warm companionship in the safe and sheltered cocoon of their home:

> When I tarry at market
> No form will cross Durnover Lea
> In the gathering darkness, to hark at
> Grey's Bridge for the pit-pat o' me.
>
> When the supper crock's steaming,
> And the time is the time of his tread,
> I shall sit by the fire and wait dreaming
> in a silence as of the dead.

But as those good times are now only a memory the poem ends with a repetition of the mournful refrain. The barred door, the wound clock, and the shared bed once signified security and the reassurance of a continuing day-to-day routine. But as these things can no longer solace her, she dismisses them, and in doing so she rejects life itself.

In "The Farm-Woman's Winter (CP, 162) a woman's memories of her dead husband elicit a similar keenly felt sense of loss. Picturing him with pity as "One frail . . . bravely tilling / Long hours in gripping gusts," she rebukes

the savage winter for snatching him away from her. Because of both its content and its mood "She Hears the Storm" (CP, 228) could be grouped with these two poems to form a trilogy of short lyrics. As Dennis Taylor observes, the characters in all three are "memory-driven" (Hardy's Poetry, 94). Furthermore the nature of their memories are similar, as the speaker of the latter poem also remembers the concern she once felt for a vulnerable mate, and realizing she would feel it again were he living and exposed to the dangers of the storm she hears raging outside, she exclaims:

> I should have murmured anxiously,
> 'The pricking rain strikes cold;
> His road is bare of hedge or tree,
> And he is getting old.'

However, now that the one she cared for has gone she is quite apathetic about the effect of the severe weather on other wayfarers, taking bleak consolation in the knowledge that her husband, at least, "has won that storm-tight roof of hers / Which Earth grants all her kind."

One element linking these three poems is the realization by each of the bereaved women of the full extent of her loss. There are other poems, however, in which a loved-one's death is acknowledged only tardily if not denied altogether. One of these is the narrative poem "The Slow Nature" (CP, 46), which recounts how a woman, on being informed that her husband has been gored to death by a bull, passes through three distinct phases before finally accepting the reality of the tragedy. First, because the bearer of the grim news is Kit Twink, a notorious practical joker, she laughs at him thinking this to be just one more of his pranks. But after gazing a little longer on his "unwontedly sad" face the truth of his message finally dawns on her. In shock himself for once, the customarily "merry man" is amazed and distressed to discover that the newly widowed woman's reaction to his tidings seems far more superficial than his

own. Her first concern is for her reputation as a housekeeper when her husband's body is borne home. Anxiously she cries:

> 'O my chamber's untidied, unmade my bed,
> Though the day has begun to wear!
> "What a slovenly hussif!" it will be said,
> When they all go up my stair!'

But this is just the second stage of her denial, and it does not take long for a violent reversal of attitude to take place as her true feelings, and Kit's as well, finally emerge:

> But a fortnight thence she could take no food,
> And she pined in a slow decay:
> While Kit soon lost his mournful mood
> And laughed in his ancient way.

The seesawing of emotions in this poem gives way to unrelieved desperation in "Bereft, She Thinks She Dreams" (CP, 314), another poem concerned with a woman's struggle to suppress the actuality of her lover's death:

> I dream that the dearest I ever knew
> Has died and been entombed.
> I am sure it's a dream that cannot be true,
> But I am so overgloomed
> By its persistence, that I would gladly
> Have quick death take me,
> Rather than longer think thus sadly;
> So wake me, wake me!
>
> It has lasted days, but minute and hour
> I expect to get aroused
> and find him as usual in the bower
> Where we so happily housed.
> Yet stays this nightmare too appalling,
> And like a web shakes me,
> And piteously I keep on calling,
> And no one wakes me!

Her denial of the truth is a defense mechanism gone awry. Instead of protecting her until she is ready to acknowledge the magnitude of her loss, and endure the grief it will

bring, it has trapped her in a terrible stalemate. The dream that should have been a transient experience has turned into a nightmare she is powerless to end. The stultifying irresolution of the two concluding lines is almost intolerable. Unless she can escape from this horrible web of repressed knowledge no healing can take place.

Because of their anecdotal nature many of these short lyrics share a bond with another very important segment of Hardy's canon, those longer narrative ballads which Edmund Gosse likened to "Wessex novels distilled into a wine glass." The strong influence of the traditional ballads on Hardy's work has been noted by Thom Gunn, who believes that it extends beyond his narrative poems and is felt equally in the majority of his short reflective pieces (22). Hardy appears to have found the traditional ballad form, with its frequent emphasis on violent action, a particularly useful medium for poems in which a survivor suffers remorse and guilt caused by memories of an individual for whose death he or she feels responsible. The two ballads I have selected have the word "tragedy" in the title, and in each of them Hardy indulges his fondness for melodrama.

Probably the best-known of his ballads is "A Trampwoman's Tragedy" (CP, 152). It describes how the protagonist and her fancy-man had been roving across the countryside with their nomadic companions, jeering John and Mother Lee. Toward sundown one evening, as they toiled up Poldon crest toward a favorite inn, the trampwoman, on an impulse, decided to flirt with jeering John to tease her lover. Having reached the inn, with its beautiful panoramic view, the vagabonds might have expected a time of conviviality and relaxation. But the trampwoman, failing to perceive the extent of her fancy-man's jealousy continued to flirt, even more openly, with his rival. Finally, to tease her lover further, she allowed him to believe that the child she was carrying was not his but actually jeering John's. The results were catastrophic:

Then up he sprung, and with his knife -
And with his knife
He let out jeering Johnny's life,
Yes; there, at set of sun.

This signaled the collapse of the trampwoman's whole world. With her lover hanged for jeering John's murder, and Mother Lee mysteriously perished as well, she wandered thereafter "[u]nfriended in the wild," giving birth alone on the moor to a stillborn child. She does finally have the opportunity to reassure her lover's ghost that the child really was his, but, unable to find solace herself, she strays alone over the Western Moor consumed by guilt and remorse.

Paul Zietlow is troubled by what he perceives as the "grotesque disparity between error and consequences" in this poem. He maintains that the gap between the trampwoman's actions and their end result is "senselessly out of proportion." He sees her as guilty only of "a careless yielding to impulse and a failure of perception." Yet while these are "serious errors, meriting correction," her punishment, the total destruction of her world, is unwarranted. (104-5).

It could be argued, however, that the tramp-woman made a series of errors, which stacking up synergistically, were bound to end in tragedy. Her first mistake was yielding to the frivolous impulse to flirt with one man in order to tease the other. Her next was her failure to perceive the extent of her lover's "dark distress" as they trudged up Poldon hillside. The third was her behavior at the inn where, abetted by jeering John, she pushed her real lover past the point of endurance:

Inside the settle all a-row -
All four a-row
We sat, I next to John, to show
That he had wooed and won.
And then he took me on his knee,
And swore it was his turn to be
My favoured mate, and Mother Lee

Passed to my former one.

Even at this point tragedy might have been averted had she not made two more serious errors. Next her lover directed the question to her in a voice she "had never heard":

> . . . "One word,
> My lady, if you please!
> Whose is the child you are like to bear? -
> His? After all my months o' care?

She failed, however, to perceive the warning in his strained outburst. And lastly, her obtuseness, in failing to realize that further teasing was not only inappropriate, but dangerous in the extreme, led her to make the most serious mistake of all when she allowed her lover to believe that the child was not his. Considering the escalation of violent emotions, and coupling their impact with the expectations raised by the ballad genre itself, it is difficult to imagine any outcome other than a tragic one.

Hardy was hurt and disappointed when Cornhill magazine declined to print this poem on the grounds that it was unsuitable for a family periodical (L&W, 341). No doubt it was the subject of unwed pregnancy, rather than the poem's violent incidents, which caused it to be deemed offensive. It is not surprising then that another ballad, "A Sunday Morning Tragedy" (CP, 155), with its theme of abortion added to that of single motherhood, would be rejected on similar grounds by two periodicals before Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) sought it for publication in the English Review (Purdy, Bibliographical Study, 139). This poem is narrated by the mother of a beautiful young woman, admired by all, who falls in love and becomes pregnant. After the mother's pleas fail to persuade her daughter's lover into marriage, she desperately seeks help from a shepherd who claims knowledge of a herb purported to terminate unwanted pregnancies. But hope turns to tragic irony when the remedy proves fatal to the young woman, just as the mother learns that the repentant

lover has publicly announced that he now is willing to marry his sweetheart after all.

On the surface the point of the poem is simple enough. The mother is consumed with guilt and remorse because she allowed fear of scandal to blind her to the physical danger to which she was exposing her daughter. Her distress is made clear by Hardy in the concluding quatrain:

> I kissed her colding face and hair,
> I kissed her corpse - the bride to be! -
> My punishment I cannot bear,
> But pray God <u>not</u> to pity me.

It is obvious that her guilt is such that she neither expects nor desires absolution for her error. A closer reading of the poem, however, reveals a fascinating interplay of subtextual elements. On a more obscure level the young woman is a latter-day Persephone, an innocent flower maiden violated by a conscienceless lover. The narrative begins with the mother's statement: "I bore a daughter flower-fair." And the young man reinforces the floral imagery when he belatedly returns to claim his bride, calling her his "flower", and even more specifically, his "picotee," a particularly exquisite parti-colored bloom. Throughout the poem the girl's "innocency" is stressed, and she is described as "wronged" and "sinless." Pluto-like her seducer makes her his "thrall" and leads her to a dark nether world of shame and ultimately death. Her dying words to her mother are "I feel as I were like to die, / And underground soon, soon should be."

If the mother resembles Demeter in her excess of grief at the loss of her daughter, she is also, obliquely, the fertility goddess who paradoxically brings barrenness to the earth as an after-effect of her grief. Not only is she responsible for the death of her daughter and the "untimely fruit" she is bearing, but she also unwittingly places a curse on the earth when, while recalling how she gazed

"fieldwards" all day long waiting for the shepherd to bring her the herb, she says: "Now fields I never more would see!"

An interesting comparison can be made between this mythical subtext in the poem and certain of Milton's lines in Paradise Lost which it seems to echo:

> Not that fair field
> Of Enna where Proserpin gathring flowrs
> Her self a fairer flowr by gloomie Dis
> Was gatherd, which cost Ceres all that pain
> To seek her through the world (IV: 265-72).

Furthermore, if Milton is comfortable mingling pagan myth in his decidedly Christian epic, it might be argued that Hardy is following his example in this poem. However, in his characterization of the shepherd, he does so in a peculiarly convoluted way. At first the mother perceives him as a savior, a type of Christ the Good Shepherd. As he crosses the fields at the close of day, bringing the herb she believes will be the antidote for all her shame and distress, he is literally transfigured by the rays of the setting sun:

> The sunset-shine, as curfew strook,
> As curfew strook beyond the lea,
> Lit his white smock and gleaming crook,
> While slowly he drew near to me.

The quaint preterite verb form "strook" intensifies the biblical flavor of these lines. But this is a dark version of the pastoral motif. If the shepherd is not exactly an evil man he is, in a sense, an amoral one, and inadvertently he is a bringer of destruction. The mother might have been warned from the beginning by her instinctual awareness of his subtlety:

> - There was a shepherd whom I knew,
> A subtle man, alas for me:
> I sought him all the pastures through,
> Though better I had ceased to be.

He is, in fact, a marginal character in a world where simple Christian piety is the norm. The tragedy, as the title suggests, occurs on a Sunday morning when worshippers are returning home from church where the banns have just been read announcing the forthcoming wedding. And when the mother confides her fears to the shepherd she calls her daughter's unwanted pregnancy "the plight / That is so scorned in Christendie," using the archaic dialect word of the Wessex peasantry to describe the society in which she lives. However the shepherd's disinterest in making moral judgments sets him apart. Not only is he unshocked by the concept of illegitimacy, he actually condones abortion which many of his Christian neighbors would regard as a far greater transgression. Finally, defending the medicinal herb he uses to control the population of his flock, he argues speciously:

> " 'Tis meant to balk ill-motherings" -
> (Ill-motherings! Why should they be?) -
> "If not would God have sent such things?"

Although his rationalization is fallacious the mother, all too willingly, succumbs to the temptation to be persuaded by it. While watching through the night over the "poppling" herbal brew she steels her determination to obviate her daughter's disgrace:

> 'This scandal shall be slain,' said I,
> 'That lours upon her innocency:
> I'll give all whispering tongues the lie;' -
> But worse than whispers was to be.

When that which is far worse than scandal does indeed occur the mother's guilt is such that she will find release from it only by dying herself. Throughout the poem she repeats a litany of phrases expressing her longing for death. If these phrases are abstracted from their context and compressed into a brief catalog, the intensity of her remorse begins to border on the histrionic:

But dead and gone I now would be.
Though better I had ceased to be.
And in my grave I now would be.
Christ, how I wished my soul could flee.
While coffined clay I wished to be.
Ah, in my grave I well may be.

How vastly different is the flat, commonplace language of the monologue "The Man He Killed" (CP, 236). Its speaker, a rustic returned soldier, puzzles over the casual randomness of death in war. He has killed a man very much like himself, who is technically his enemy although there is no personal reason why he should be so:

'I shot him dead because -
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

'He thought he'd 'list, perhaps,
Off-hand like - just as I -
Was out of work - had sold his traps -
No other reason why.

Probably neither soldier had enlisted out of real patriotism, and had they met under any other circumstances they might have become good friends:

'Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!

But, as David Perkins observes, the speaker is a man of limited perceptions who finally accounts for his violent action in words that "are so far below the mark that they tease and trouble in a peculiar way" (A History of Modern Poetry, 152):

'Yes quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat if met where any bar is,
Or help to half-a-crown.

Beyond the speaker's recounting of his personal experience, however, is the larger message of the poem condemning the futility of war itself. And the deflating adjectives "quaint" and "curious," by the very unexpectedness of their ironic understatement, may well focus attention on this message even more effectively than would more conventional terms for describing the evils of war.

If the irony of "The Man He Killed" is somehow disturbing, there are a number of lighter satirical pieces in Hardy's canon which expose the insensitivity of the living to the dead and dying in a more humorous vein. Two examples are "The Pink Frock" (CP, 409) and "At the Draper's" (CP, 348) in each of which a woman's vanity and shallow concern for her own fashionable appearance occlude any sense of grief at the thought of a loved-one's impending death. The apathetic attitude of the gravedigger toward the dead in "The Sexton at Longpuddle" (CP, 745) reveals a similar self-centeredness:

> He passes down the churchyard track
> On his way to toll the bell;
> And stops, and looks at the graves around,
> And notes each finished and greening mound
> Complacently,
> As their shaper he,
> And one who can do it well.

By giving the word "complacently" a line to itself Hardy accents the bland self-satisfaction and false sense of proprietorship felt by the sexton admiring the graves. As their shaper he regards them as his personal property, almost akin to a form of material wealth. He regards the death of others merely as the means of his own future job security:

> And, with a prosperous sense of his doing,
> Thinks he'll not lack
> Plenty such work in the long ensuing
> Futurity.
> For people will always die,
> And he will always be nigh
> To shape their cell.

Reassured in the knowledge that death comes inevitably to others, he lulls himself into believing in his own immortality. It is true that "people will always die." But he too is one of those people. He will not "always be nigh" to shape the cells of others, but will one day be obliged to occupy one of them himself.

"Seen By the Waits" (CP, 325) is a poem which merits a more than superficial reading because of its rather shocking premise. The satire in this poem is contingent upon the discrepancy between appearance and reality. The manor lady who appears to be lonely and sad is secretly jubilant:

> Through snowy woods and shady
> We went to play a tune
> To the lonely manor-lady
> By the light of the Christmas moon.
>
> We violed till, upward glancing
> To where a mirror leaned,
> It showed her airily dancing,
> Deeming her movements screened:
>
> Dancing alone in the room there,
> Thin-draped in her robe of night;
> Her postures, glassed in the gloom there,
> Were a strange phantasmal sight.
>
> She had learnt (we heard when homing)
> That her roving spouse was dead:
> Why she had danced in the gloaming
> We thought, but never said.

Although it is not explicitly stated the "waits" are almost certainly the members of the Mellstock choir, whose characters and their adventures are delineated in much finer detail in the novel Under the Greenwood Tree and poems such as "The Dead Quire," "The Phaphian Ball," and "The Rash Bride." This band of strolling musicians, on their Christmas-caroling rounds, go out of their way through dark, snowy woods at night to entertain the lady of the manor because they believe she deserves their pity, her husband a faithless rover having deserted her during the festive

season, the most dismal time to spend all alone. Contrary to their expectations the lady is anything but miserable. Her clandestine dancing, as they later learn, is her response to the news that her husband is dead. The logical ellipsis in the final line allows for speculation about the precise source of the manor-lady's glee. She may merely be relieved to learn she has been freed from an unfortunate marriage, or she may have another lover waiting in the wings to replace him, or perhaps she may even have had some hand herself in her husband's untimely death. In any case her furtive elation at the thought of his death places her at the opposite end of the emotional spectrum to the grieving widows in poems like "Bereft."

However acute was Hardy's awareness of the wide range of ways in which the dead live on in memory, he left us in no doubt as to how he wished to be remembered himself. He sets it forth clearly and thoughtfully in his obituary to himself "Afterwards" (CP, 511), a poem of such sensitivity and beauty that it must be quoted in full:

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
'He was a man who used to notice such things'?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
'To him this must have been a familiar sight.'

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, 'He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone.'

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
'He was one who had an eye for such mysteries'?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
'He hears it not now, but used to notice such things'?

Hardy's description of his long life of successful achievement as a "tremulous stay" is disarming in its modesty. He does not ask to be known to posterity as a great man of letters, but rather as someone who closely observes and cares about the subtle beauties of nature and the welfare of the vulnerable creatures of the world. The sensory imagery, aural and visual, in the poem underscores his alertness to the natural world. He notices minute phenomena such as the barely perceptible alighting of the hawk, soundless as the blink of an eyelid, just as clearly as he observes nature on a grand scale watching the mysterious starry panorama of the winter sky. But with the unclouded eye of a post-Romantic poet he sees nature in all its ugliness as well as its beauty. The "glad green leaves" of May might be as delicate as "new-spun silk," but the "upland thorn" is "wind-warped." Springtime's warmth and light is counterbalanced by the blackness and gloom of night and winter. Above all, one man alone striving to protect innocent creatures from the perils facing them in the wild is virtually powerless against the inexorable forces of nature.

Seen as a poet's requiem for himself, this poem bears distinguishable resemblances, particularly in the closing stanza, to Tennyson's lines:

Twilight and evening bell
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
When I embark.

Yet unlike "Crossing the Bar" Hardy's poem offers no hope of a union with the Divine after death. The only immortality he seeks is to be remembered as one observant of, and concerned about, the external world and its inhabitants.

While death is clearly the dominant thread woven through this group of poems, in the other group bifurcating away from the concept of memory, the afterlife prevails. But this version of the afterlife is of a more sturdy and durable nature than is simply living on in the thoughts of others. We grant this kind of reprieve from oblivion when we enshrine the dead in such art forms as the elegy and the epitaph, or in substantive artifacts like tombstones and memorial tablets designed to outlive their makers.

Many would agree that the belief of poets over the ages in the immortality of art achieves its ultimate expression in Keats's famous ode. "When old age shall this generation waste," youth and beauty will remain eternally frozen on the frieze of a Grecian urn. Jerome Buckley, while asserting that "none repeats the miracle" of Keats's ode, proceeds, nevertheless, to describe how later generations of poets similarly sought in art something more perdurable than the merely human. During the late Victorian era, for example, certain literary aesthetes turned for confirmation to the French Parnassians, who elevated poetry to the level of a religious cult. Particularly influential among these English disciples was Théophile Gautier, whose "L'Art," in Austin Dobson's translation, Buckley cites as an excellent summation of the Parnassians' reverence for the longevity of art:

> All passes. Art alone
> Enduring stays to us;
> The bust outlasts the throne,-
> The Coin, Tiberius;
>
> Even the gods must go;
> Only the lofty Rhyme
> Not countless years o'erthrow,-
> Not the long array of time.
> (<u>The Triumph of Time</u> 143-4)

It was in that same lofty rhyme that Hardy preserved the memory of numerous fellow poets, friends, family members, and even his pets for posterity. Walter de la Mare certainly

recognized this aspect of his work in his poetic tribute "Thomas Hardy," part of which reads:

> And there peered from his eyes, as I listened, a concourse of women and men,
> Whom his words had made living, long-suffering--they flocked to remembrance again. (30).

Trevor Johnson would agree when he states that "[p]erhaps no poet has ever paid finer tributes to those, living and dead, who have influenced him, than Hardy" (Thomas Hardy, 56).

Speaking of elegiac poetry in general, William E. Buckler sees in it:

> an authentic sort of classical immortality . . . and this is given a heightened and endlessly extended reality if . . . the deceased has the good fortune to be "immortalized" in this way by a poet. ("The Dark Space Illumined," 106)

In fact Hardy, in The Well-Beloved, goes even further to imply that not to be eulogized in this way is to be forgotten. He speaks in this novel of "the race," a treacherous body of water where two tides clash, and from "whence many a Lycidas had gone 'visiting the bottom of the monstrous world' but had not been blessed with a poet as a friend" (119).

One of Hardy's more unusual elegies immortalizing another poet is "To Shakespeare: After Three Hundred Years" (CP, 370). Pinion remarks that this poem, written in response to an invitation to contribute to the volume A Book of Homage to Shakespeare commemorating the tercentenary of that writer's death, owes much to Matthew Arnold's sonnet, beginning "Others abide our question," in which he stresses "the baffling nature" of Shakespeare's genius "and his ordinariness as a man" (125). Yet despite this debt, and the arbitrariness of this poem's composition, it is uniquely Hardyan in its treatment of its subject. As in Arnold's sonnet the contrast between the near-anonymity of Shakespeare's personal life and the sublimity of his artistry

is emphasized. However, unlike Arnold's stiffly poetic diction, Hardy's recreation of the Stratford townsfolk's colloquial language, with its numerous caesurae mimicking the fits and starts of informal conversation, infuses this contrast with local color and realism. At the news of their illustrious neighbor's death their conversation is casual, almost dismissive:

> . . . 'Yes, a worthy man and well-to-do;
> Though, as for me,
> I knew him but by just a neighbour's nod, 'tis true.
>
> 'I' faith few knew him much here, save by word,
> He having elsewhere led his busier life;
> Though to be sure he left us with his wife.'
> - 'Ah, one of the tradesmen's sons, I now recall. . . .
> Witty, I've heard. . . .
> We did not know him. . . . Well, good-day. Death comes
> to all.'

In spite of the fact that Shakespeare's "penned dreams" still throb on today "[i]n harmonies that cow Oblivion," to those around him he was virtually unknown and of interest to them solely in respect to his economical status and his rank in their provincial social hierarchy. The poem closes with an extraordinary simile which brings into sharp focus the riddle of Shakespeare's genius:

> So, like a strange bright bird we sometimes find
> To mingle with the barn-door brood awhile,
> Then vanish from their homely domicile -
> Into man's poesy, we wot not whence,
> Flew thy strange mind,
> Lodged there a radiant guest, and sped forever thence.

A poem of far more personal significance to Hardy is his elegy in memory of his friend and neighbor, the Dorset dialect poet William Barnes. In "The Last Signal" (CP, 412) Hardy describes how, while walking eastward to attend Barnes's funeral on a dull late afternoon, the westering sun flashed momentarily on the coffin. Hardy interpreted this as

a final farewell, signaled to him by Barnes "on his grave-way, / As with a wave of his hand."

Two other poets eulogized by Hardy, Meredith and Swinburne, were also personally known to him. His relationship with the former began in 1869, when George Meredith, as a publisher's employee, read the manuscript of Hardy's first novel The Poor Man and the Lady, whose socialistic bent and heavy-handed satire Meredith believed would be meat too strong for the conventional critics of the day. Although he counseled Hardy not to "nail his colours to the mast" by publishing so radical a first book, Meredith strongly encouraged the young author to continue writing (L&W, 62-4). Despite Hardy's notorious sensitivity to criticism he took Meredith's advice, and forty years later, on learning of the older poet's death, he wrote "George Meredith" (CP, 243) in which he describes Meredith's "note" at their first meeting as "trenchant, turning kind." The two men were to meet periodically over the years, and although Hardy had certain reservations about Meredith as a novelist, he liked and deeply respected him as a man (Selected Letters, 221-2). The elegy closes with the lines:

> . . . Further and further still
> Through the world's vaporous vitiate air
> His words wing on - as live words will.

Although the poet is dead his words continue to survive, even in the polluted atmosphere of a materialistic world. The bird metaphor applied to those words seems to imply that they represent the very soul of the poet. It is a compliment to Meredith that Hardy chose the demanding terza rima stanza for this poem. His readers sometimes overlook the fact that his early experimentation in rhyme and meter bore fruit in later years in the form of a richly varied prosodic harvest.

In "A Singer Asleep" (CP, 265), Hardy's elegy to Algernon Charles Swinburne, it is not only the skillful manipulation of rhyme and rhythm, but also the blending of

elements drawn from the pastoral elegiac tradition with modern ideology and syntax which makes this Hardy's most impressive memorial poem to a fellow poet. Millgate observes how deeply Hardy was affected by the deaths of Swinburne and Meredith in the spring of 1909 (Selected Letters, 216, n.) He remembered vividly his intoxication with Swinburne's early verse when he was a young man studying architecture in London. Writing to Swinburne in 1897 he recalled

> the buoyant time 30 years ago, when I used to read your early works walking along the crowded London streets, to my imminent risk of being knocked down. (Selected Letters, 116)

Hardy sympathized profoundly with Swinburne because of the vilification he had undergone at the hands of the press. And while visiting him in the summer of 1905, Hardy relates how they "laughed and condoled each other on having been the two most abused of living writers" (L&W, 350).

Dennis Taylor, describing "A Singer Asleep" as "the climactic pre-1912 example of Hardy's meditative poem," traces its development out of the traditional elegy from "Lycidas" through "Adonais" to be modified "into a form consistent with Hardy's own meditative purposes" (Hardy's Poetry, 17-19). Similarly, Peter Sacks observes the way in which this poem echoes Swinburne's writing style, and demonstrates how its imagery links it to Swinburne's own tribute to Baudelaire, written following a false report of his death, "Ave Atque Vale," and beyond that to Baudelaire's homage to his "singing mistress" Sappho, suggesting the "immortal continuity" between great poets. But, like Taylor, Sacks sees Hardy placing pressure on the tradition in this elegy to mold it into a more modern work of art (230-2).

It is true that the poem's Swinburnian lushness and liquidity of language mark a rare departure for Hardy from his usual unadorned and granular style. Furthermore the

oceanic imagery and the Sapphic allusions do indeed represent a conscious and reverential imitation of certain elements in "Ave Atque Vale." The poem begins with a serene, unhurried description of Swinburne's final resting place:

I

In this fair niche above the unslumbering sea,
That sentrys up and down all night, all day,
From cove to promontory, from ness to bay,
The Fates have fitly bidden that he should be
Pillowed eternally.

The paired opposites, up and down, night and day, coastal inlet and jutting headland, high and low terrain, create a sweeping sense of inclusiveness that is both calming and consoling. The beautiful image "Pillowed eternally" completes the picture of death as sweet and unending repose.

The second stanza, however, abruptly changes the mood, jerking the reader back from the poet's timeless resting place by the sea to the hostile modern world with which he contended during life. In a striking extended simile Hardy deftly captures the jarring effect of Swinburne's effusively lyrical and free-spoken verse upon the staid Victorian society amidst which he lived:

II

- It was as though a garland of red roses
Had fallen about the hood of some smug nun
When irresponsibly dropped as from the sun,
In fulth of numbers freaked with musical closes,
Upon Victoria's formal middle time
His leaves of rhythm and rhyme.

While, on the one hand, the heavy alliteration in these lines, "red roses," "rhythm and rhyme," and "fallen," "fulth," "freaked," and "formal" is indeed reminiscent of Swinburne's style, Sacks points out that, on the other hand, the daring modernity of the diction in such phrases as "some smug nun" and "irresponsibly dropped" carries this elegy forward into the twentieth century (228-31).

Continuing in this more contemporary vein, with the streets of London as a setting, Hardy next moves on to his own ecstatic discovery of Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads":

III
O that far morning of a summer day
When, down a terraced street whose pavement lay
Glassing the sunshine into my bent eyes,
I walked and read with a quick glad surprise
New words in classic guise, -

IV
The passionate pages of his earlier years.
Fraught with hot sighs, sad laughters, kisses,
tears. . .

The "quick glad surprise" of Hardy's discovery brings to mind Keats's similar astonishment on his first encounter with a great poet new to him in Chapman's Homer, which he in turn likens to the amazement of the early Spanish explorers coming unexpectedly on the Pacific ocean and looking "at each other with a wild surmise."

As Sacks observes, despite this poem's modernity, elements such as the strewing of flowers and the blowing of flute notes link it firmly to the traditional pastoral elegy. Similarly Shelley's denunciation of Keats's enemies and Milton's assault on the grating "scrannel pipes" of the clerics are reechoed in Hardy's harsh attack on Swinburne's critics (131):

V
I still can hear the brabble and the roar
At those thy tunes, O still one, now passed through
That fitful fire of tongues then entered new!
Their power is spent like spindrift on this shore;
Thine swells yet more and more.

After bringing the poet triumphantly through the fire of adverse criticism Hardy proceeds to describe Swinburne's indebtedness to his ancestral muse Sappho, "she the music mother / Of all the tribe that feel in melodies." Then, in a typical Hardyan gesture, he envisions nightly meetings

between the ghosts of "singing mistress" and her disciple at the ocean's brim, during which she hands on the poetic legacy to him:

VIII
One dreams him sighing to her spectral form:
'O teacher, where lies hid thy burning line;
Where are those songs, O poetess divine
Whose very orts are love incarnadine?'
And her smile back: 'Disciple true and warm,
Sufficient now are thine.' ...

As the poem ends the elegist withdraws from his narrowly focused vision of the dead poet, leaving him to merge back into the vast, timeless, unslumbering seascape of the opening stanza:

IX
So here, beneath the waking constellations,
Where the waves peal their everlasting strains,
And their dull subterrene reverberations
Shake him when storms make mountains of their plains -
Him once their peer in sad improvisations,
And deft as wind to cleave their frothy manes -
I leave him, while the daylight gleam declines
Upon the capes and chines.

It is entirely appropriate that Swinburne, whom Hardy knew to be a keen swimmer (L&W, 65), should in death become one with the sea, the feature of the natural world so loved by him.

No less felicitous is the mergence of man and mountain in "The Schreckhorn" (CP, 264), a poem of homage to another of Hardy's literary friends, the editor, philosopher, and alpinist Sir Leslie Stephen. It is probably no coincidence that "The Schreckhorn" and "A Singer Asleep" appear side by side in Satires of Circumstance. Although the poem was commenced in 1897 when Stephen was still alive, it did not appear in print until 1906, two years after his death (Purdy, Bibliographic Study, 162), and its elegiac character is quite evident. Hardy's friendship with Stephen dated from

the early part of his career, and it was largely due to him that Hardy rose from a virtually unknown writer to an established novelist, when, as editor of the prestigious Cornhill magazine, Stephen serialized the novels Far From the Madding Crowd and The Hand of Ethelberta (Biography, 172). He was among the first of the critics to recognize Hardy's "fresh and original vein" (L&W, 112), and Hardy, for his part, readily admitted that Stephen was "the man whose philosophy was to influence his own for many years, indeed, more than that of any other contemporary" (L&W, 102).

The publication of "The Schreckhorn" prompted a letter of appreciation from Virginia Woolf in which she acknowledged that the poem was finely evocative of her father's personality (Biography, 172). In his reply Hardy described Stephen as a man who "had a peculiar attractiveness for me, & I used to suffer gladly his grim & severe criticisms of my contributions & and his long silences, for the sake of sitting with him (Selected Letters, 296). The octave of this sonnet, in particular, does indeed paint a graphic word portrait of both Stephen the man and the mountain with which he was so closely associated:

> Aloof, as if a thing of mood and whim;
> Now that its spare and desolate figure gleams
> Upon my nearing vision, less it seems
> A looming Alp-height than a guise of him
> Who scaled its horn with ventured life and limb,
> Drawn on by vague imaginings, maybe,
> Of semblance to his personality
> In its quaint glooms, keen lights, and rugged trim.

Gazing at the mountain as he draws near to it for the first time, the poet is inspired by the way in which it seems to become transformed into the quintessence of his friend who once conquered its peak. Its "spare and desolate" outline reminds him of Stephen's tall gaunt frame, its "quaint glooms," and "keen lights," capture the light and shade of his brilliant, brooding personality, and "rugged trim" suggests his strength of character. While these lines

portray Stephen, during his lifetime, lured by the mountain's similitude to himself, the sestet which follows goes beyond this simple magnetism to conjecture that after his death he may actually merge into, and become one eternally with, his beloved mountain:

> At his last change, When Life's dull coils unwind,
> Will he, in old love, hitherward escape,
> And the eternal essence of his mind
> Enter this silent adamantine shape,
> And his low voicing haunt its slipping snows
> When dawn that calls the climber dyes them rose.

Here Stephen is doubly immortalized, in the elegy itself and in the mountain of its title. But Pinion draws attention to the inconsistency between the intimation of immortality in this poem and the denial of any possibility of life after death in so many others. He suggests that there may have been times "when Hardy's less rational self accepted the possibility of spiritual life after death" (96). I believe, however, that it is far more likely that Hardy is expressing a wish for, rather than a belief in, eternal life in this poem, just as in the case of the kneeling oxen he finds himself "Hoping it might be so." In the traditional sonnet the sestet commonly resolves a problem raised in the preceding octave. But here the poem ends in a question, undermining any real sense of resolution. Will his subject, the poet asks, really be immortalized in this way? The juxtaposition of beauty and peril in the final couplet subtly provokes further feelings of ambivalence. The snows are rose-colored and lovely in the rays of the rising sun, but at the same time they are slipping treacherously. Perhaps these images subconsciously reflect Hardy's ambivalence toward Christian notions of immortality, which he must have found a roseate prospect to contemplate, but a dangerously unreliable one to actually believe in.

All of the elegies discussed to this point commemorate men of letters whose own works would certainly spare them

from fading into oblivion. But Hardy also memorialized in verse some of his most loved family members whose simple, unexceptional lives might otherwise have passed into obscurity. For example there are at least two poems dedicated to his father, "To My Father's Violin" (CP, 381) and "On One Who Lived and Died Where He Was Born" (CP, 621). The first of these presents death in an unusual light for Hardy. Instead of being a state of sweet oblivion, restful sleep, or a happy release from a life of pain, it is here shown to be a condition decidedly inferior to life. The poem is addressed to the anthropomorphized musical instrument left dumb, dust-covered, and worm-eaten now that its former owner has departed for the "Nether Glooms" of those "Mournful Meads hereunder, / Where no fiddling can be heard." This Virgilian version of "Acheron and the Shades" as Hardy calls it, (L&W, 440), represents an underworld of deadly silence, devoid of bird song and music, in which the poet imagines his father enduring tedious hours that "may be a dragging load upon him." In their separation from each other both violin and master are lifeless and dispirited. In contrast Hardy conjures up the violin's "olden story," reminding it of the delightfully animated times when the two worked in concert to lead the "homely harmony" of the Stinsford church choir, or enlivened the country dances with their "merry tunes" on those carefree times when "the psalm of duty" was "shelved for the trill of pleasure." While Hardy depicts his father's life in positive terms in this poem, "On One Who Lived and Died Where He was Born," perhaps unwittingly, makes it appear one of parochial dullness and stifling limitation. This rather pedestrian piece leaves the reader with the impression that the only two important events in its subject's life were being carried downstairs as a new-born infant and ascending those same stairs for the last time as a frail, moribund eighty-year-old. What passes between those two events is dismissed as "a vain pantomime."

"After the Last Breath" (CP, 223), written shortly after the death of his mother Jemima Hardy, however, strikes one as an authentic and natural outpouring of the mingled emotions of regret and relief experienced by Hardy at that time. On the one hand he had been extremely close to his mother. She had been an indelible influence on his life, and her "extraordinary store of local memories" (L&W, 345) must have provided much source material for his art. On the other hand she was ninety years old, deaf, suffering toward the end, and she herself wished to die. In a letter to his friend Edward Clodd following her death Hardy wrote that "there is really nothing for commonsense to regret. Yet one does regret" (Selected Letters, 176). These mixed emotions are finely evoked in the poem:

> There's no more to be done, or feared, or hoped;
> None now need watch, speak low, and list, and tire;
> No irksome crease outsmoothed, no pillow sloped
> Does she require.
>
> Blankly we gaze. We are free to go or stay;
> Our morrow's anxious plans have missed their aim;
> Whether we leave tonight or wait till day
> Counts as the same.
>
> The lettered vessels of medicaments
> Seem asking wherefore have we set them here;
> Each palliative its silly face presents
> As useless gear.
>
> And yet we feel that something savours well;
> We note a numb relief withheld before;
> Our well-beloved is prisoner in the cell
> Of Time no more.
>
> We see by littles now the deft achievement
> Whereby she has escaped the Wrongers all,
> In view of which our momentary bereavement
> outshapes but small.

By using the plural "we" Hardy speaks for the bereaved family as a whole. Stanzas one through three describe how the moment of death brings to its members an immediate, almost embarrassing, feeling of release from emotional

stress. They gaze "blankly," as if hesitant to recognize that matters of such urgency just moments before are now inconsequential. The final two stanzas, however, mark a shift in perception. They are now able to accept their sense of "numb relief," not only without guilt, but with an actual sense of well-being. Death has not defeated their "well-beloved." Instead she is the victor, having escaped the prison of the old arch-enemy "Time," and having deftly evaded those who would do her wrong. By viewing her death in this light the grief of those who mourn her is minimized. They can now find consolation and move on with their own lives.

When Hardy's favorite sister Mary died eleven years after his mother, however, he was far less able to come to terms with his loss. Little more than a year his junior she had been his dearest and closest companion throughout childhood, and remained his "chief confidante" until the time of his marriage (Biography, 17). When Mary died in 1915, after a prolonged and painful illness, Hardy appeared outwardly relieved that she had been spared further suffering. But shortly afterward he fell ill himself and withdrew to his room refusing to see anyone other than his wife Florence in her role as nurse. Millgate believes that "the death of the sister who had been so much to him in childhood and early manhood" shocked him profoundly. His younger sister Kate, writing to a relative, reported that he "had changed utterly and aged considerably since Mary's death" (Biography, 507). The series of poems written in memory of his sister form a tender, muted tribute in a minor key. While their impact is eclipsed by the impassioned "Poems of 1912-13," occasioned by the loss of his wife Emma three years earlier, these quiet meditative poems accurately mirror, nevertheless, the shy, introspective nature of his unassuming maiden sister, granting immortality to one who, dwelling "among untrodden ways," might easily have been forgotten. "Logs on the Hearth: A Memory of a Sister" (CP,

433), is perhaps the gentlest evocation of Hardy's memory of their shared childhood:

> The fire advances along the log
> Of the tree we felled,
> Which bloomed and bore striped apples by the peck
> Till its last hour of bearing knelled.
>
> The fork that first my hand would reach
> And then my foot
> In climbings upward inch by inch, lies now
> Sawn, sapless, darkening with soot.
>
> Where the bark chars is where, one year,
> It was pruned, and bled -
> Then overgrew the wound. But now, at last,
> Its growings all have stagnated.
>
> My fellow-climber rises dim
> From her chilly grave -
> Just as she was, her foot near mine on the bending limb,
> Laughing, her young brown hand awave.

Dennis Taylor touches briefly on the similarity between the fireside settings in this poem and "Frost at Midnight" (Hardy's Poetry, 15). There are, however, further parallels to be drawn between the two poems. In each of them, looking into the fire stirs in its author nostalgic memories of childhood. Furthermore Coleridge, like Hardy, recalls, in particular, a beloved sister, whom he describes as his playmate when both were clothed alike in infancy.

Of course, as William E. Buckler points out, the poem is ostensibly "a requiem for an apple tree" (The Poetry, 284). By placing his real subject behind this distancing screen, Hardy gives her presence a certain delicacy and amorphousness. The first three stanzas deal solely with the tree and the poet's own relationship with it. Only in the final stanza is his "fellow-climber' overtly referred to, although her presence has been sensed throughout the poem. During its life the tree was a resilient source of produce and pleasure, with whom the happy healthy little girl who once climbed it can be identified. Even in death they share

a bond. Both have undergone a transformation, through death, to an afterlife of sorts. The tree is revitalized by the energy of the flames blossoming from its limbs into a comforting source of warmth and light. And the poet's dead sister is conjured back to life again as, gazing into the fire, he fancies he sees in its depths her dim spectral figure.

It would seem to some quite anticlimactic to move from poems about people to elegies written for departed pets. But to Hardy this would probably appear quite a natural transition. His deep concern for the welfare of animals had both an emotional and an intellectual component. In the first place, as Millgate speculates, perhaps because of his childlessness he and both of his wives doted upon and utterly spoiled their pets (Biography, 504). On a more cerebral level he was greatly influenced by the way in which Darwin's revelation of the interconnectedness of all living things challenged the ingrained belief of human beings in their uniqueness and superiority. In a 1910 letter to the Secretary of the Humanitarian League Hardy stressed that "the far-reaching consequence of the establishment of the common origin of all species" necessitated a "re-adjustment of altruistic morals" and an extension of the application of the "'Golden Rule' beyond the area of mere mankind to that of the whole animal kingdom" (L&W, 376). In far lighter vein is his tongue-in-cheek explanation of this same concept in the poem "Drinking Song":

> Next this strange message Darwin brings,
> (Though saying his say
> In a quiet way);
> We all are one with creeping things;
> And apes and men
> Blood-brethren,
> And likewise reptile forms with stings.

His poems about his own animals, however, are far more personal and emotional in nature. Among the many pets buried under the trees at Max Gate was "Snowdove" a cat whose

death Hardy felt keenly for many years afterward (Pinion, 189). "Last Words to a Dumb Friend" (CP, 619), written in his memory, is as wistful an elegy as many poems mourning the loss of a human being. The falling cadence of its trochees seems to match the poet's dejected mood:

> Pet was never mourned as you,
> Purrer of the spotless hue.

Remembering how in life he would stand expectant, "Arched to meet the stroking hand," the poet's loss becomes so painful that he vows:

> Never another pet for me!
> Let your place all vacant be;
> Better blankness day by day
> Than companion torn away.

Equally affectionate are two poems inspired by the Hardys' notorious dog Wessex. In spite of his bad behavior--he dominated the household, biting postmen, terrorizing servants, and once viciously killing a stoat--he was adored and pampered by his master and mistress (Biography, 531). In "A Popular Personage at Home" (CP, 776), Wessex speaks in the first person for the bulk of the poem, firmly establishing his identity, his mastery over his environment, and his zest for living:

> 'I live here: "Wessex" is my name:
> I am a dog known rather well:
> I guard the house; but how that came
> To be my whim I cannot tell.
>
> "With a leap and a heart elate I go
> At the end of an hour's expectancy
> To take a walk of a mile or so
> With the folk I let live here with me.

In doggy relish Wessex sniffs out "rarest smells" and rolls in the grass during his walk. Animal-like he lives in the present, taking it for granted that he and the countryside he claims as his territory will "stay the same a thousand

years." However in the final stanza Hardy, the real speaker of the poem, steps out from behind the facade of the dog's persona, and, speaking now of Wessex in the third person, he ascribes to his pet his own typically human anxieties about transience and mortality:

> Thus: 'Wessex". But a dubious ray
> At times informs his steadfast eye,
> Just for a trice, as though to say,
> 'Yet, will this pass, and pass shall I?'

Hardy was deeply saddened when Wessex did die shortly after Christmas in 1926. On the day following the burial he made an entry in his notebooks, which reads in part:

> Our devoted, (and masterful) dog Wessex died on the 27th, and last night had his bed outside the house under the trees for the first time in thirteen years. We miss him greatly. (Personal Notebooks, 284)

As he had done for so many of his human loved ones Hardy personally designed a headstone for the grave, on which was carved "The Famous Dog Wessex . . . Faithful, Unflinching" (L&W, 469). His final tribute, the elegy "Dead 'Wessex' the Dog to the Household" (CP, 907), movingly conveys Hardy's keen sense of loss. Two of its verses read:

> Do you look for me at times,
> Wistful ones?
> Do you look for me at times
> Strained and still?
> Do you look for me at times,
> When the hour for walking chimes,
> On that grassy path that climbs
> Up the hill?
>
> You may hear a jump or trot,
> Wistful ones,
> You may hear a jump or trot -
> Mine, as 'twere -
> You may hear a jump or trot
> On the stair or path or plot;
> But I shall cause it not,
> Be not there.

A verse form related to the elegy, yet vastly different from it in tone and structure, is the epitaph. While the primary purpose of the epitaph is to make a short aphoristic summation of an individual's life and philosophy suitable for engraving on a headstone, it has been used just as frequently to satirize someone still living, or simply to make some pithy ironic point. Hardy has a handful of epitaphs scattered throughout his poetry, and it is usually for these latter two purposes that he adopts the form.

To compare and contrast Hardy's elegies and epitaphs is to experience once more the paradox of his double vision. The elegies treat their subjects with the warmth, humanity, and specificity consistent with his close-up view of life. The epitaphs, on the other hand, because they must compress a great deal into a small space are, of necessity, very general in nature, and predictably, they are suffused with the pessimism engendered by his wide overview of the cosmos. Take, for example, "Cynic's Epitaph" (CP, 770):

> A race with the sun as he downed
> I ran at eventide,
> Intent who should first gain the ground
> And there hide.
>
> He beat me by some minutes then,
> But I triumphed anon,
> For when he'd to rise up again
> I stayed on.

This poem first appeared in The London Mercury along with "Epitaph on a Pessimist" (CP, 779) which it somewhat resembles in its devalorizing of life:

> I'm Smith of Stoke, aged sixty-odd,
> I've lived without a dame
> From youth-time on; and would to God
> My dad had done the same.

It is difficult at first glance to decide who is the more contemptuous of life, the cynic or the pessimist. Both poems

contain elements characteristic of the pale strand of death woven through Hardy's work. However, these elements are not necessarily identical. To the cynic life has been such a sour experience that death represents a victorious state from which he has no desire to be resurrected. The pessimist, however, in spite of his acerbic humor, actually holds the darker view. To him, death is not only superior to life, But the whole generative process is so repugnant that, like Tess, he wishes he had never been born at all.

"A Necessitarian's Epitaph" (CP, 877) has none of the pessimist's grim humor to leaven the bleakness of its message:

> A world I did not wish to enter
> Took me and poised me on my centre,
> Made me grimace, and foot, and prance,
> As cats on hot bricks have to dance
> Strange jigs to keep them from the floor,
> Till they sink down and feel no more.

This is perhaps Hardy's tersest summation of the ideas dwelt upon at length in so many of his most pessimistic poems where he declares that feeling and consciousness are a curse, and that not to be born is a blessing. And certainly, from the viewpoint of a necessitarian, where man is regarded as a helpless puppet manipulated by mindless forces, this kind of despair is understandable. But as a number of critics have pointed out, Hardy is inconsistent in his thinking, and he is by no means an unqualified necessitarian. Pinion, for one, cites the "Apology" appended to Late Lyrics and Earlier, in which Hardy propounds his "evolutionary meliorism," and conjectures that, under the right circumstances, organic life might possess, after all, a "modicum of free will" (250).

Probably much closer to Hardy's more usual stoic acceptance of life's limitations is "Epitaph" (CP, 659).

> I never cared for Life; Life cared for me,
> And hence I owed it some fidelity.
> It now says, 'Cease; at length thou hast learnt to
> grind

> Sufficient toll for an unwilling mind,
> And I dismiss thee - not without regard
> That thou didst ask no ill-advised reward,
> Not sought in me much more than thou couldst find.'

This philosophy is developed further in "He Never Expected Much" (CP, 873), in which Hardy, on his eighty-sixth birthday, reflects on the wisdom of enduring without protest the colorlessness of life. Here once again Hardy seems to be hedging his bets. By expecting no more from life than "neutral-tinted haps and such" he is far less vulnerable to disappointment.

In another poem written late in life, "A Placid Man's Epitaph" (CP, 890), the speaker takes a similar "take it or leave it" attitude to his monochromatic existence:

> As for my life, I've led it
> With fair content and credit;
> It said: 'Take this.' I took it.
> Said: 'Leave.' And I forsook it.
> If I had done without it
> None would have cared about it.
> Or said: 'One has refused it
> Who might have meetly used it.'

If Hardy found the epitaph perfectly adapted to some of his more somber reflections, he also found it a useful tool for getting revenge. On his deathbed, just hours before he died, he dictated bitter epitaphs to two men who had insulted him and whom he never had forgiven, G. K. Chesterton and George Moore (Biography, 571). The former is depicted as a narrow-minded bigot, and of Moore he says; "Heap dustbins on him: / They'll not meet / The apex of his self conceit."

Epitaphs, because of their marmoreal concreteness, lead one to thoughts of inscriptions on tombstones as a way of reifying the memory of the dead. As Millgate observes, Hardy's frequent visits to Stinsford churchyard, where so many of his family members were buried, triggered memories which "made a crucial contribution to the extraordinary poetic creativity of [his] old age" (Biography, 515-6).

Considering Hardy's deep, almost morbid, veneration of tombstones and their inscriptions, it is not surprising that they should feature in a large number of poems. Not all of them, however, show Hardy at his best. Take, for example, the long-winded melodrama "The Obliterate Tomb" (CP, 317). Its narrator recounts how, late in life, he returns to the family tomb of his enemies in order to make amends by recarving their fading inscriptions. But a descendant of the dead family preempts him, claiming it is his duty to make the restoration. As might be expected he fails to do so, and as the engraved records are gradually eroded away by the weather, the once-illustrious family is forgotten and their tomb is dismantled. Some of the lines in this poem could undoubtedly provide ammunition for those critics who accuse Hardy of infelicitous diction. One example would be where the repentant speaker describes himself as formerly the family's "chief enemy - one whose brain had schemed / To get their dingy greatness deeplier dingied / And disesteemed." Another would be where the ghosts of the family members rise up to taunt their erstwhile enemy: "'Ha,' they hollowly hackered, / 'You come, forsooth.'"

Equally lurid, "The Inscription" (CP, 642) is the tale of a beautiful widow who, vowing to remain faithful to her deceased husband or be damned eternally, has her name engraved on his memorial brass, leaving only her own date of death to be filled in later. Predictably she falls in love again, but fear of breaking her vow precludes remarriage. She disappears mysteriously in the end, but not before losing her wits and haunting the church where she stares at the brass "feeling the words with her finger" and "gibbering in fits."

Fortunately, not all Hardy's poems on this subject are as sensational as these. As a welcome contrast comes the contained, dignified grief of "Sacred to the Memory" (CP, 633), another poem dedicated to his sister Mary:

That 'Sacred to the Memory'
Is clearly carven there I own,
And all may think that on the stone
The words have been inscribed by me
In bare conventionality.

They know not and will never know
That my full script is not confined
To that stone space, but stands deep lined
Upon the landscape high and low
Wherein she made such worthy show.

In this poem Hardy is tacitly recognizing the limitations of epitaphs written on tombs. Because they are restricted to a confined space they must of necessity be brief, gnomic, and even vaguely platitudinous. Like a long chemical formula compressed into a few brief symbols they must be expanded out on order to read and comprehend their "full script." Only in this way can the extent of the poet's emotions be measured. Furthermore the epitaph as a verse form, ever since its ancient origins, has suffered the indignity of being vulgarized to make vitriolic, ludicrous, or blatantly ribald statements about their writers' enemies. Perhaps because of these disadvantages, Hardy's epitaphs and poems about inscriptions on tombs are frequently among his more forced, artificial efforts. Yet there are some fine poems where this same tombstone image, is not the main focus but is glancingly touched upon amid a rich array of other images. One of these is "Lying Awake" (CP, 844):

You, Morningtide star, now are steady-eyed, over the east,
I know it as if I saw you;
You, Beeches, engrave on the sky your thin twigs, even the least;
Had I a paper and pencil I'd draw you.

You, Meadow, are white with your counterpane cover of dew
I see it as if I were there;
You, Churchyard, are lightening faint from the shade of the yew,
The names creeping out everywhere.

The falling meter of the dactyls and the numerous retarding commas create a brooding sense of time passing slowly and tediously for the sleepless speaker of the poem. It is obvious from his statements "I know it as if I saw you," and "I see it as if I were there," that he cannot see the objects he is addressing except in his mind's eye. Lying awake in the dark stimulates his imagination so that he brings each of these inanimate objects to eerie life, first by personalizing them with a capital letter and secondly by endowing each of them with some human characteristic. The star is looking down steady-eyed. The beech trees are at work engraving their art on the sky. The meadow, unlike the wakeful speaker, is sleeping peacefully under its own counterpane. And the churchyard is actively lighting up the names on its tombstones so that they come creeping out, like living things from the shade of the yew tree that had obscured them. By using the pathetic fallacy in this way Hardy creates a weird ghostly world where the distinction between things living and dead is blurred. The last line, which gives the cold chiseled names an uncanny, lifelike mobility, is the most arresting of all.

Another poem which incorporates the image of names on tombs, almost as an afterthought following a complex series of apparently unrelated images, is "During Wind and Rain" (CP 441). Few would disagree with Harold Bloom, who calls this "as good a poem as our century has given us" (Modern Critical Views, 19):

They sing their dearest songs -
He, she, all of them - yea,
Treble and tenor and bass,
  And one to play;
With the candles mooning each face....
  Ah, no; the years O!
How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!

They clear the creeping moss -
Elders and juniors - aye,
Making the pathways neat
  And the garden gay;

And they build a shady seat....
Ah, no; the years, the years;
See, the white storm-birds wing across!

They are blithely breakfasting all -
Men and maidens - yea,
Under the summer tree,
With a glimpse of the bay,
While pet fowl come to the knee....
Ah, no; the years O!
And the rotten rose is ript from the wall.

They change to a high new house,
He, she, all of them - aye,
Clocks and carpets and chairs
On the lawn all day,
And the brightest things that are theirs
Ah, no; the years, the years;
Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.

On a first reading of this poem one may be troubled by an elusiveness atypical of Hardy's usual transparency of meaning. But when studied more closely it becomes clear that this is perhaps his most skillful manipulation of the contraries eros and thanatos to bring them to a perfect synthesis. The first five lines of each stanza are positively life-affirming. In them the "elders and juniors," "men and maidens," who are evidently members of the same family, are engaged in pleasurable or productive activities. First they are singing their "dearest songs" around a piano by candlelight. Next they are working together to beautify the garden. Then they are "blithely breakfasting" in a delightful alfresco setting. And finally they are preparing to move to a new house in a higher, possibly better, location. But after each of these vignettes with all their vital connotations comes a meaningful pause in the form of four periods, followed by a two-line memento mori, consisting of an alternating refrain recalling the transience of life: "Ah, no; the years O!" and 'Ah, no; the years the years;" after which comes an ominous image suggesting disquiet, decay, and ultimately death: "sick leaves," "storm birds," the "rotten rose," and then the

tombstones carved with the names of those family members once so vibrantly alive.

Strangely, although the poem is written in the present tense, it leaves one feeling that its events happened a long time ago. It has the wistful reflectiveness and nostalgia for departed people and bygone pleasures found in ubi sunt poetry. The final stanza is the most equivocal of all. Although I have just interpreted the moving of the family to a high new house as having a positive connotation, it can also be read as having a sinister one. The vision of furniture and family treasures taken out of the house, scattered carelessly on the lawn, and exposed to the weather is disquieting. It implies the break up of the once happy home. Just as disturbing is the fact that they "change," rather than move, to their new house. Hardy sometimes uses the word "change" in its biblical sense as a synonym for dying. The fact that the "high new house" they change to is actually death seems to be confirmed by the powerful last line: "Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs." In this line Hardy deftly fuses the strands of death and the afterlife. While the inscriptions connote death they also preserve the memory of those named in them in a substantive way. Yet like all Hardy's versions of the afterlife this is a tenuous one. It will come to an end when the dead are forgotten after the wind and the rain have completed their work of obliteration.

CHAPTER 5

The Finitude and Plurality of the Hardyan Afterlife

The more one studies the poetry the more apparent it becomes that the fragility and transience of the Hardyan afterlife are among the chief characteristics distinguishing it from its Christian counterpart, eternal life after death. It may seem redundant to press the point that this is a function of his loss of orthodox religious faith, as Kenneth Marsden reaffirms when he contends that belief in a living, personal God is virtually the same as belief in immortality of the soul (66-7). Less explicable, however, may be the reason for the wide variety of shapes and forms Hardy's afterlives assume. Perhaps an analogy can be drawn from Shelley's famous lines:

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

As Hardy readily admits, his philosophy of life, as expressed in his poetry, is not based on fixed, irrefutable dogma, but on

> a series of feelings and fancies written down in widely differing moods and circumstances, and at various dates. It will probably be found, therefore, to possess little cohesion of thought or harmony of colouring. . . . [T]he 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. ("Preface," Poems of the Past and Present, CP 84)

Thus, to Hardy, the beam of unrefracted white light representing eternal life after death is passed through the prism of human experience to be broken down into a multitude of colors, shifting and glancing across the spectrum of his poetic afterlives, to illuminate each of them momentarily,

each with its promise of consolation stained by the mutability and caprice inherent in the human condition.

In the preceding chapters I have drawn attention to several ways in which Hardy seeks to perpetuate life beyond the grave. Souls may be seen resting in a state of blissful slumber. They may return as ghostly visitants to haunt their old abodes. They may be transformed to rarefied essences adrift in time and space. Even more frequently, they live on in the memories of those who cared for them, or they are enshrined by those loved ones more enduringly in art or memorial artifacts. In the following pages I will next identify four more of these humanistic alternatives to Christian immortality, the first achieved by making some significant contribution to society, the second by passing on one's genes to one's descendants, the third by transmigrating after death into another living organism, and the last, by permanently imprinting one's personality on one's environment.

The first of these categories may seem a little obvious. It is a time-worn concept that great men in such fields as art, literature, science, and statecraft achieve a kind of immortality through their works. Hardy certainly pays due homage in his poetry to this kind of greatness, but even dearer to his heart are certain ordinary individuals who have passed into obscurity themselves, yet who have, nevertheless, left some mark of their earthly pilgrimage behind them.

Hardy rescues one such individual from oblivion in a poem with the aptly impersonal title "A Man" (CP, 123).[1] It tells the story of a humble workman employed to help in the demolition of a priceless historic mansion. The first two stanzas provide the backdrop to his drama, and establish the incongruity of a house of such magnificence existing, far from the royal court, in rural Casterbridge, (the Wessex name for Hardy's native Dorchester):

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[1] The individual who prompted Hardy's subtitle to this poem (In Memory of H. of M.) has not been identified (Pinion 57).

I

In Casterbridge there stood a noble pile,
Wrought with pilaster, bay and balustrade
In tactful times when shrewd Eliza swayed. -
On burgher, squire, and clown
It smiled the long street down for near a mile.

II

But evil days beset that domicile;
The stately beauties of its roof and wall
Passed into sordid hands. Condemned to fall
Were cornice, quoin, and cove,
And all that art had wove in antique style.

The fact that the house gave universal pleasure across all class barriers, "smiling the long street down" on the local peasantry and the small-town shopkeepers as well as the landed squirearchy, lends added poignancy to its later deterioration under the ownership of crude, insensitive newcomers. Sadly, its egalitarianism did not extend to the short-sighted contractors hired to dismantle the gracious mansion when confronted with the recalcitrance of an employee who, when informed of his task at the last moment, answered them boldly:

'Be needy I or no,
I will not help lay low a house so fair!

IV

'Hunger is hard. But since the terms be such -
No wage, or labour stained with the disgrace
Of wrecking what our age cannot replace
To save its tasteless soul -
I'll do without your dole. Life is not much!'

His superiors dismissed him "with sneers," more for having the effrontery to "carp on points of taste" with his betters than for his refusal to work. They put him squarely back on his own rung of the social ladder with the reproach: "Rude men should work where placed, and be content." From that time onward the man wandered workless and penniless, a

social pariah to the end. When he sickened and died at last it was said of him, 'A man intractable / And cursed is gone':

> . . . None sighed to hear his knell,
> None sought his churchyard place;
> His name, his rugged face, were soon forgot.

After being torn down stone by stone the ancient house eventually was also forgotten by all but a few. Yet in spite of the workman's personal extinction some relic of his unswervable integrity was destined to survive him, if only in the mind of the poet, where: "His protest lives where deathless things abide!"

If this man's protest is remembered in spite of the disappearance of an irreplaceable old house, antithetically, the topic of "The Old Workman" (CP, 624), is a house so solidly constructed that its continuing presence attests the craftsmanship of its builder long after he is forgotten. A descendant of Wordsworth's aged leech gatherer, this old mason, bent double from the arduous demands of his trade, exhibits the same spirit of resolution and independence as his prototype. Heaving massive loads of stone to the upper levels of a stately residence under construction finally strained his back leaving him impaired for life. However neither his disability nor the ignorance of the mansion's owners to his plight has embittered him. Accepting their indifference with magnanimity he places their welfare ahead of his own:

> 'They don't know me, or even know my name,
> But good I think it, somehow, all the same
> To have kept 'em safe from harm, and right and tight,
> Though it has broke me quite.

Caring little for personal recognition after death, he is content to allow the house to remain a long-standing,

serviceable monument to his craftsmanship and dedication after he has gone:

> 'Yes; that I fixed it firm up there I am proud,
> Facing the hail and snow and sun and cloud,
> And to stand the storms for ages, beating round
> When I lie underground.'

While this unknown old workman aspires to a vicarious immortality through his handiwork representing the accomplishment of a lifetime of faithful service, the musician in "Barthélémon at Vauxhall" (CP, 519) achieves his as the byproduct of a singular flash of inspiration. Because of this poem's variations on a more traditional format it may not immediately be apparent that it is actually a sonnet, composed of three quatrains and a concluding couplet, with the uncommon rhyme scheme:
abba acca adad ee. Similarly, the anecdote which the poem describes tends to obscure its underlying message, that the artist is merely a conduit whose inspiration is derived from a higher source rather than a creator ex nihilo.[2]

> He said: 'Awake my soul, and with the sun,'...
> And paused upon the bridge, his eyes due east,
> Where was emerging like a full-robed priest
> The irradiate globe that vouched the dark as done.
>
> It lit his face - the weary face of one
> Who in the adjacent gardens charged his string,
> Nightly with many a tuneful tender thing,
> Till stars were weak, and dancing hours outrun.
>
> And then were threads of matin music spun
> In trial tones as he pursued his way:
> 'This is a morn,' he murmured, 'well begun;
> This strain to Ken will count when I am clay!'
>
> And count it did; till, caught by echoing lyres,
> It spread to galleried naves and mighty quires.

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[2] Because the poem begins rather cryptically, in medias res, Hardy's appended note of explanation is useful: "Francois Hippolite Barthélémon, first fiddler at Vauxhall gardens, composed what was the most popular morning hymn-tune ever written. It was formerly sung, full-voiced, every Sunday in most churches, to Bishop Ken's words, but is now seldom heard."

The first two stanzas highlight the disparity between two separate sides of Barthélémon's nature, the temporal and the spiritual. The former is symbolized by his dance tunes, trivialized by the phrase "many a tuneful tender thing," whose popularity will wane with passing fashion. The latter, however, is symbolized by his hymn, whose lasting fame will seal his bid for immortality. All things related to his carnal nature are blurred with the tarnish of mortality. The night is coming to an end, the stars have grown weak, the fiddler's face is weary, and the hours spent catering to the frivolous pleasures of the dancers are outrun. In contrast the scene of his spiritual awakening is associated with symbols of lasting promise. A brilliant new day has only just begun, light has conquered darkness, and the composer's face is illuminated by the invigorating rays of the rising sun. The striking simile likening the sun to "a full-robed priest" evokes the awesomeness of the source of his inspiration, and at the same time brings with it a comforting sense of continuity suggested by the vestments associated with time-honored religious rituals.

The remainder of the poem, however, moves on to the important subtext concerned with the role of the artist in his or her own creation. It is significant that line nine begins with the passive voice: "And then were threads of matin music spun," as if to imply that the composer is the mere recipient of those threads already spun. If this is the case then the trial and error of composition is a matter of selecting and arranging existing elements drawn from an archetypal pool rather than a pure act of creation. As if in recognition of this fact the composer humbly cedes his bid for personal immortality to his music, with the words: "This strain to Ken will count when I am clay!" In the concluding couplet the hymn-tune does indeed pass out of the hands of its maker as it spreads far and wide under its own momentum "to galleried naves and mighty quires." It also extends on

down through time long after Bartélémon himself has become clay. Yet while its popularity endures far beyond that of his ephemeral dance tunes, its afterlife is also limited, for as Hardy's note explains, this once cherished morning hymn "is now seldom heard."

The same message which "Barthélémon at Vauxhall" compresses into fourteen lyrical lines is spelt out with a far heavier hand in the 109 prosy pentameter couplets of "The Abbey Mason" (CP, 332). Perhaps Hardy should be forgiven for indulging his novelistic impulse in this long, rambling narrative poem considering his own professional involvement with church architecture and restoration. Yet, in spite of its flaws, this poem has its merits, if not in respect to its historical accuracy, then at least for its deeper inquiry into the nature of the creative process.

The poem relates the story of the invention of the peculiarly English "Perpendicular" style of Gothic architecture by a now-forgotten master mason during the rebuilding of Gloucester Cathedral in the Middle Ages (L&W, 384-5). Troubled by the inflexibility of the existing Gothic style he exhausted himself physically and emotionally attempting to devise a way to achieve a more natural interplay between the curving lines of the cathedral's stone tracery. On the point of giving up in despair, the solution was revealed to him early one morning by nature itself. During the night slender white rivulets traced by melting icicles had trickled down over the lines of his experimental diagrams, uniting upper segments to arcs below. Overjoyed, the mason solidified nature's fortuitous design into his own work and a new style of architecture was born. As the building progressed rapidly with the application of this new technology its inventor was warned against the sin of pride by an envious medieval killjoy, Abbot Wygmore, who chided:

> . . . You pride yourself too much
> On your creation. Is it such?

surely the hand of God it is
That conjured so, and only His! -

Disclosing by the frost and rain
Forms your invention chased in vain;

Hence the devices deemed so great
you copied, and did not create.

Chastened, the overly conscientious mason renounced all claim to fame and fortune for his invention, giving sole credit for "the deft design" to "Heaven's outshaping." Many years after his death an enlightened new prelate, Abbot Horton, admiring the mason's ingenuity vowed to rescue him from obscurity and give him the recognition he deserved. While admitting that no mortal can, like God, create aught out of naught, he maintained, nevertheless, that the artist should be duly praised for his role in transmuting divine inspiration into art, adding:

He did but what all artists do,
Wait upon Nature for his cue.

However the abbot, more a man of words than of action, never did fulfill his vow, and, after all, the mason "passed into oblivion dim / And none knew what became of him!" despite his personal self-effacement, however, he would live on anonymously through the success of the perpendicular style, which eventually spread far and wide:

Till every edifice in the isle
Was patterned to no other style.

But, once again, the mason's vicarious afterlife was a temporal one, and the popularity of his invention would eventually wane when finally, after "long having played its part / The curtain fell on Gothic art."

A common thread linking each of these four poems is the tendency for some trace of an action's beneficent influence to linger on transcending the memory of its perpetuator. In each case a decent, ordinary individual accepts without

murmur the inevitability of his personal effacement. In stark contrast to this attitude comes the narcissistic greed for immortality exhibited by the subject of "The Children and Sir Nameless" (CP, 584). Above all it is the obtrusive method by which he chooses to memorialize himself which renders his eventual obliteration more ignominious than it need have been. A crotchety misopedist he scorns the thought of attaining the kind of "green remembrance" he craves through producing troublesome, thankless progeny:

> Sir Nameless, once of Athelhall, declared:
> 'These wretched children romping in my park
> Trample the herbage till the soil is bared,
> And yap and yell from early dawn till dark!
> Go keep them harnessed to their set routines:
> Thank God I've none to hasten my decay;
> For green remembrance there are better means
> Than offspring, who but wish their sires away.'

The knight's quarrel with children, however, goes far deeper than his annoyance over their shrill yelling, their trampling of his lawn, or even their callous disregard for their parents' longevity. The real problem lies in the fact that they are living creatures with minds and wills of their own. They are filled with the innate selfishness necessary to survive and thrive as individuals in a competitive world. In other words they are untrustworthy recipients of his genes because he cannot count on any children he might sire to be perfect replicas of himself. A statue of himself, on the other hand, would be reassuringly inanimate. It would stand fixed and immutable, bearing his likeness carved exactly according to his own inflated self-image, throughout the ages. Stanza two describes his resolution to impose himself on posterity idealized in this way:

> Sir Nameless of that mansion said anon:
> 'To be perpetuate for my mightiness
> Sculpture must image me when I am gone.'
> - He forthwith summoned carvers there express
> To shape a figure stretching seven-odd feet
> (For he was tall) in alabaster stone,

> With shield, and crest, and casque, and sword
> complete:
> When done a statelier work was never known.

The statue's exaggerated height (with the poet's wry aside "for he was tall,") and its embellishment in full knightly regalia, add amusing mock-heroic touches to sharpen the irony of the indignity this brazen piece of self-aggrandizement would one day undergo when defaced by the hobnailed boots of disinterested children not of its originator's bloodline:

> Three hundred years hied; Church-restorers came,
> And no one of his lineage being traced,
> They thought an effigy so large in frame
> Best fitted for the floor. There it was placed,
> Under the seats for schoolchildren. And they
> Kicked out his name, and hobnailed off his nose;
> And, as they yawn through sermon-time, they say,
> 'Who was this old stone man beneath our toes?'

Vern Lenz and Douglas Short, citing the statue as the "archetypal symbol of immortality," find echoes of Shelley's "Ozymandias" in this poem. They point out, however, that there are sharp contrasts in tone and purpose between the two poems. In the first place "The Children and Sir Nameless" lacks the epic grandeur of "Ozymandias" both in diction and in subject matter. Secondly Hardy amplifies Shelley's theme by introducing the possibility of children as an alternative way to gain immortality (371-2). The object lesson of Sir Nameless would suggest, even further, that this might indeed be a far more satisfactory way in which to assure one's continuance. D. H. Lawrence in his "Study of Thomas Hardy" apparently supports this contention when he states:

> The glory of mankind has been to produce lives, to produce vivid, independent, individual men, not buildings or engineering works or even art, not even the public good. (436)

Hardy's fascination with his own genealogy and his concerns about his childlessness are symptomatic of a general preoccupation with the immortalizing powers of heredity, an

interest possibly heightened by his reading of August Weismann's Essays upon Heredity, which "propounds a theory of the immortality of the germ plasm" (Bailey, A Handbook and Commentary, 348). In one of Hardy's notes he contemplates the idea of one's reincarnation down through the generations of one's descendants as resembling an endless prolongation of one's own life:

> A story (rather than a poem) might be written in the first person, in which 'I' am supposed to live through the centuries in my ancestors, in one person, the particular line of descent chosen being that in which the qualities are most continuous. (L&W, 452)

Another note reveals him pondering the time-defying aspects of heredity again:

> The story of a face which goes through three generations or more, would make a fine novel or poem of the passage of Time. The differences in personality to be ignored. (L&W, 226)

Hardy did, in fact, incorporate this idea in his novel The Well-Beloved, in which Jocelyn Pierston falls in love, consecutively, with the three Avices, mother, daughter, and granddaughter:

> the second something like the first, the third a glorification of the third, at all events externally, [who] were the outcome of the immemorial island customs of intermarriage and prenuptial union, under which conditions the type of feature was almost uniform from parent to child through generations. (The Well-Beloved, 246)

Hardy's profoundest statement on this subject, however, is the short but significant poem "Heredity" (CP, 363), which clearly promotes genetic inheritance as a most effective means of challenging the limits of the mortal life span:

> I am the family face;
> Flesh perishes, I live on,

Projecting trait and trace
Through time to times anon,
And leaping from place to place
Over oblivion.

The years-heired feature that can
In curve and voice and eye
Despise the human span
Of durance - that is I;
The eternal thing in man,
That heeds no call to die.

Heredity, then, for Hardy is the same as the soul in other theologies, the immortal essence that survives the death of the flesh.

Kenneth Marsden observes that this poem "has the succinct finality of an epigram and yet arouses reverberations that extend far beyond its ostensible subject." For one thing it carries with it the implication that if perpetuation through offspring confers a kind of immortality on an individual, conversely, "childlessness or extinction of a family line is a kind of death" (69). As if to confirm that the strands of death and the afterlife are always coexistent in Hardy's work, "She, I, and They" (CP, 365), which apparently expresses his unhappiness over how his own childlessness will mean the extinction of his family line, appears just two poems after "Heredity" in Moments of Vision. It describes a childless couple sitting surrounded by ancestral portraits when suddenly the silence is broken by a mysterious sigh. Unable to determine its source they half dream that it emanates from their disappointed forebears, bemoaning the fact that these two represent "the last / Of stocks once unsurpassed," who are "unable to keep up their sturdy line."

In stanza one of "Sine Prole" (CP, 690), the speaker voices a similar feeling of regret at finding himself the last of his line.

Forth from ages thick with mystery,
Through the morn and noon of history,
To the moment where I stand

Has my line wound: I the last one -
Outcome of each spectral past one
Of that file, so many manned!

Just as the whole expanse of history, in these lines, is symbolized by a single day with a morn and a noon, in stanza two the whole phylogenesis of a family line is compared to the ontogenesis, of a single individual, and in this case the death of the latter will mean the end of the former:

Nothing in its time-trail marred it:
As one long life I regard it
Throughout all the years till now,
When it fain - the close seen coming -
Makes to Being its parting bow.

So, as with all Hardy's afterlives, living on in one's lineal heirs is not the same as everlasting life. And the possibility of a family's extinction is not its only problematical feature. Another question heredity raises is that it by no means promises that one's individuality will be handed down over and over through one's descendants. As Sir Nameless feared they will never be one's exact clones. Because a child inherits genes from each of its parents, one's own genetic contribution will become diluted, exponentially, down through the generations. Another serious drawback to genetic continuity is its haphazardness. Children have absolutely no control over which of their ancestor's genes nature will choose to be their legacy. Hardy tackles both of these problems in "To a Motherless Child" (CP, 42). First, the maiden to whom the poem is addressed has been bequeathed only half of her beloved mother's characteristics, and secondly, they are not necessarily the traits the poet himself would have chosen, but a random selection dealt out by fickle Nature, working blindly to perform her "mechanic artistry":

Ah, child, thou are but half thy darling mother's;
Hers couldst thou wholly be,
My light in thee would outglow all in others;

She would relive to me.

But niggard Nature's trick of birth
Bars, lest she overjoy,
Renewal of the loved on earth
Save with alloy.

The Dame has no regard, alas, my maiden,
For love and loss like mine -
No sympathy with mindsight memory-laden;
Only with fickle eyne.
To her mechanic artistry
My dreams are all unknown,
And why I wish that thou couldst be
But One's alone!

Pinion believes that Hardy was correct in describing this poem as "A Whimsey" in the first edition, because the speaker's "dreams" of seeing his beloved's identity reborn intact in her offspring run contrary to the laws of nature (22-3). Jude, he observes, indulged in a similarly illusory dream when he imagined his well-beloved married to another, and having children

> more or less in her own likeness around her. But the consolation of regarding them as a continuation of her identity was denied to him, as to all such dreamers, by the willfulness of Nature in not allowing issue from one parent alone. (Jude the Obscure, 186)

"Lorna the Second" (CP, 893) is another poem deploring the fact that the special qualities which set a beloved woman apart are withheld from her less-gifted daughter. Although it is a slighter poem than "To a Motherless Child" it happily lacks the latter's jarring archaisms and petulant tone. It begins:

Lorna! Yes, you are sweet,
But you are not your mother,
Lorna the First, frank, feat,
Never such another!

But in reality the poet's quarrel with the workings of nature is not only fanciful but dangerously misguided. A world peopled with clones would be a nightmarish world of uniformity, devoid of all the delightful quirks of personality which guarantee that every individual will be unique.

Paradoxically, if the dilution of one's genes encourages diversity, the other problem with genetic inheritance, the random way it selects from the pool those genes which will determine one's character and behavior, is seen as a factor inhibiting individuality in a number of other poems. One of these, "The Pedigree" (CP, 390), begins on an ominous note:

I

I Bent in the deep of night
Over a pedigree the chronicler gave
As mine; and as I bent there, half-unrobed,
The uncurtained panes of my window-square let in the watery
light Of the moon in its old age:
And green-rheumed clouds were hurrying past where mute and
cold it globed
Like a drifting dolphin's eye seen through a lapping wave.

The speaker, poring over his family tree, appears vulnerable to the threatening elements outside. The bare, curtainless window exposes him to the sinister surveillance of the old, rheumy-eyed moon. In the second stanza, however, he is trapped more alarmingly by the baleful eye of an observer from within when the pedigree comes eerily to life:

II

So, scanning my sire-sown tree,
And the hieroglyphs of this spouse tied to that,
With offspring mapped below in lineage,
Till the tangles troubled me,
The branches seemed to twist into a seared and cynic face
Which winked and tokened towards the window like a Mage
Enchanting me to gaze again thereat.

Coerced into looking at the window again he sees it transformed, surrealistically, into a mirror which turns the symbols on the page in front of him into visual images of his ancestors, generation after generation, "dwindling backward each past each / All with the kindred look." Horrified, he realizes that not only his physical features, but his every thought, word, and action, are but repetitions of phenomena anticipated in his forebears. Nothing about him is unique:

V

Said I then, sunk in tone,
'I am the merest mimicker and counterfeit! -
Though thinking, I am I,
and what I do I do myself alone.'

Once he has absorbed this message the apparition vanishes.

As J. O. Bailey observes the speaker's dawning consciousness of his lack of personal identity leads him to the conclusion that "in spite of feeling 'I am I' he enjoys no freedom of the will" ("Heredity as Villain," 11). The sense of powerlessness evoked in the first two stanzas, where he is caught between the hostile gaze of observers from without and within, therefore foreshadows the awful realization that his genetic heritage has made him a prisoner of necessity, entrapped in a deterministic universe such as Hardy envisages in his bleakest moods. Citing the malign role of heredity in Hardy's novels, Bailey demonstrates how both Jude and Tess fall victim to inherited traits which ultimately lead to their destruction (9-19). Tess, as if instinctively aware of her inability to escape her heritage, tries to avoid knowing about it. When Angel Clare asks her why she is refusing his offer to instruct her in the study of history she responds bitterly:

> Because what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only--finding that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only act her part; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your

> nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands', and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands.' (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, 124-5)

Scarcely more reassuring is the message of the poem "Family Portraits" (CP, 912). Another fantasy, it relates how three "picture-drawn" ancestors, apparently involved long ago in a disastrous love triangle, step out of their frames to warn a descendant against repeating their tragedy by succumbing to the temptation into which the weaknesses of his "blood's tendance" will lead him. His refusal to allow them to reenact their drama, however, leaves him fearing that his failure to accept the foreknowledge available to him will cause him to repeat the painful mistakes of past generations after all.

Hardy reiterates his complaint against the arbitrariness of heredity in "Discouragement" (CP, 811), in which the fact that a "whole life's circumstance" is determined by an accident of birth is "frost to flower of heroism and worth, / And fosterer of visions ghast and grim."

If these poems exemplify the problem of our inability to choose which traits and tendencies we are to inherit from our antecedents, "Panthera" (CP, 234), makes it clear that we are equally at the mercy of the genetic dice in the matter of which characteristics we will hand down to our offspring. The speaker of this poem recalls how, as a young man, he once confessed his longing for an heir to his aged friend Panthera, a former centurion in the Roman army of occupation in Judea at the time of Christ:

> I had said it long had been a wish with me
> That I might leave a scion - some small tree
> As channel for my sap, if not my name -
> Ay, offspring even of no legitimate claim,
> In whose advance I secretly could joy.

Panthera reacted to his young friend's revelation with an unexpectedly violent diatribe on the risks of begetting children, legitimate or otherwise:

> 'Cancel such wishes boy!
> A son may be a comfort or a curse,
> A seer, a doer, a coward, a fool; yea, worse -
> A criminal.... That I could testify!'...

Panthera's outburst, requiring explanation, drew a story from him about which he was usually reticent. One day while charged with maintaining order at a public execution he had become convinced, rightly or wrongly, that the weeping mother of one of the condemned men was the woman who some thirty years earlier had borne him an illegitimate son. The alleged malefactor, "whose ardent blood" Panthera believed to be his own, was Jesus. And although moved to pity by the young man's suffering he perceived him, nevertheless, as a dangerous trouble-maker who had:

> . . . waked sedition long among the Jews,
> And hurled insulting parlance at their god,
> Whose temple bulked upon the adjoining hill,
> Vowing that he would raze it, that himself
> Was god as great as he whom they adored,
> And by descent, moreover, was their king;
> With sundry other incitements to misrule.

As an enforcer of the Roman law, and a peace-keeper, Panthera was forced to concede that the man whom he believed he had fathered was justly sentenced to death. He concluded his tale with a final warning to his young comrade in arms on the perils of siring children:

> Now glares my moody meaning on you friend? -
> That when you talk of offspring as sheer joy
> So trustingly, you blink contingencies.
> Fors Fortuna! He who goes fathering
> Gives frightful hostages to hazardry!

It is difficult to reconcile the strong antipathy toward procreation in poems such as this with the regret over his

childlessness which Hardy expressed in poems like "Sine Prole" and, more significantly, in real life. In a note written early in his first marriage, after a servant eloped with her lover, his disappointment is clear:

> Aug.13. We hear that Jane, our late servant is soon to have a baby. Yet never a sign of one is there for us. (L&W, 119)

Even as an octogenarian he included a clause in his will making provision for a possible child (Millgate, Testamentary Acts, 153). It would seem he still had not abandoned hope of producing an heir.

Perhaps this ambivalence is just another example of Hardy's double vision. From his bleak cosmic overview, having children is a hazardous activity because we are victims of chance with no free will to choose which character-shaping genes they will inherit. From his close-up human perspective, however, parenting can be a most rewarding experience. We may not have the ability to shape our children in our own image, but we do have a degree of freedom to mold them for better or worse through precept and example.

But in the long-run, whatever its flaws, heredity is still that "eternal thing in man, / That heeds no call to die." It is perhaps the surest way to cheat oblivion and to secure an afterlife on Hardyan terms. This inconsistency on the subject emerges in a poem like "The Selfsame Song" (CP, 552), in which heredity's tendency to stifle individuality actually constitutes a source of comfort for the poet:

> A bird sings the selfsame song,
> With never a fault in its flow,
> That we listened to here those long
> Long years ago.
>
> A pleasing marvel is how
> A strain of such rapturous rote
> Should have gone on thus till now
> Unchanged in a note!

- But it's not the selfsame bird. -
No: perished to dust is he....
As also are those who heard
That song with me.

The term "rapturous rote" is an oxymoron. The rapturous nature of the bird song creates the impression of a spontaneous outpouring of passion unique to the bird in question. Yet the word "rote" indicates that it is actually a mere routine repeated by the bird mechanically and without understanding. It is simply the product of genetically programmed information handed down inflexibly from generation to generation. Yet its very sameness fills the poet with a reassuring sense of the continuity existing in the natural world. It links the past with the present and reunites him, through the magic of memory, with those departed auditors who once shared his delight in the "pleasing marvel" of the bird's singing.

Birds and bird song apparently held a strong fascination for Hardy judging by the numerous poems in which these images appear. In the words of one observer, "The lot of a bird" for Hardy "is human life writ small" (Pritchard, 100). A number of critics have linked his famous poem "The Darkling Thrush" to Shelley's "To a Skylark" and Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." But, predictably, in virtually all Hardy's bird poems he finds in nature far less cause for carolings than do his Romantic predecessors. Although more limited in scope, and far less celebrated than "The Darkling Thrush," "Proud Songsters" (CP, 816) is, nevertheless, one of Hardy's choice minor poems:

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand-new birds of twelve-months growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,

No finches were, nor nightingales.
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

The first stanza addresses a subject covered in a number of Hardy's poems. The birds, blithely unaware of their own mortality, sing as if they had all the time in the world to do so. In this they differ from humans who are all too cognizant of the passage of time and its inevitable result. It is the second stanza, however, which in an oblique way relates to one more of Hardy's secular kinds of afterlife. These brand-new birds are living creatures who have evolved only recently, through a process of metamorphosis, out of inanimate elements drawn from nature's pool. But this is only one phase of the natural cycle. After death their disintegrating atoms will be returned to that pool, from which they which they will eventually be drawn once again to be incorporated into new life forms. This recycling process will be repeated over and over, endlessly extending the material existence of these birds through an ongoing series of organic entities.

"Shelley's Skylark," (CP, 66), in some respects a sequel to "Proud Songsters," illustrates the next step in this natural cycle as a dead bird's remains are broken down to nourish the growth of the surrounding vegetation. However, the poem, written while Hardy was visiting the place where Shelley wrote his famous ode, starts out appropriately enough with the evocation of another kind of afterlife, one already considered, immortalization in the form of art:

Somewhere afield here something lies
In Earth's oblivious eyeless trust
That moved a poet to prophecies -
A pinch of unseen, unguarded dust:

The dust of the lark that Shelley heard,
And made immortal through times to be; -
Though it only lived like another bird,
And knew not its immortality:

This lark is just as unconscious of the immortality the poet has conferred on it as the thrushes, finches, and nightingales of "Proud Songsters" are unaware of their mortal condition. And in both instances this ignorance stems from a failure to grasp the meaning of the consequences of living in time. For birds, life is one continual present moment. They never "look before and after, / And pine for what is not" in the way Shelley's ode proclaims we humans do. But whether the skylark cares about it or not it will be doubly immortalized in Hardy's poem. The fact that the bird has already disintegrated into a pinch of dust in the first two stanzas prepares its essential elements for the possibility of transmigration into other living things:

> Maybe it rests in the loam I view,
> Maybe it throbs in a myrtle's green,
> Maybe it sleeps in the coming hue
> Of a grape on the slopes of yon inland scene.

An inert afterlife in the form of a plant, rooted in one spot, may seem a lowly existence after living as a bird accustomed to soaring aloft in ecstatic song. But the creature's essence is still throbbing, or at worst merely dormant for a time, in these organic life forms. As herbage is consumed by animals, and they, in turn, are consumed by humans, the possibilities of ascending the evolutionary ladder are as great as are those of descending it.

This concept, central as it is to Hardy's poetry, actually has a scientific basis as well as an imaginative one. Its influence can be traced back to the ancient Greek materialist philosophers Democritus and Epicurus, and their most articulate exponent, the Roman poet Lucretius. Frank M. Turner has investigated a heightening of interest in Lucretius which occurred around the middle of the nineteenth century. Although he had long been admired for his poetry, at that time scientists began to discover unexpected parallels between his philosophy and contemporary atomic theory. A number of controversial articles which began

appearing on this subject drew a great deal of public attention. In 1860 further interest was sparked when H. A. J. Munro published one of the first modern critical editions of De Rerum Natura, which he followed four years later with a new English translation of the poem. The publication of Tennyson's poem "Lucretius" in 1868 marked a peak in the new surge of appreciation for the ancient poet and his philosophy (Turner, 329-48).

Hardy, who made his first acquaintance with Lucretius as a young architectural apprentice in London, soon became an ardent admirer of his works, marking and annotating passages which held a particular appeal for him (Bjork, Literary Notebooks, I, 361, n 1146). Writing to his friend Edward Clodd in 1897, Hardy referred to Lucretius as "that glorious Double-man" deserving of "due honour" as both a poet and a scientist (Selected Letters, 111).

Considering his own philosophical bias Hardy would have found Lucretius's assertion that we have nothing to fear in death a particularly attractive one. Contrary to the superstitious belief in eternal punishment after death in Acheron, which made life a hell on earth for his contemporaries, Lucretius proclaimed that all sensation is lost after our bodies decay, and that we return to a state of oblivion such as existed before we were born. If life has been miserable we should rejoice at being released from pain. And if life has been happy we should depart graciously, sated with the good things it has given us. He believed, moreover, that while we are mortal, the atoms from which we are formed are indestructible. His contention that nothing comes from nothing is seen by some as foreshadowing the second law of thermodynamics which states that matter can be neither created nor destroyed (Turner, 341). As death must come to all we should be content in the knowledge that the release of our atoms will provide substance for the growth of future generations who will have their fill of life and then pass away as we did.

T. H. Huxley, whom Hardy personally knew and greatly admired, describing the relationship between organic and inorganic matter, put this same principle into modern scientific terms in an essay which Hardy almost certainly read:

> The plant gathers . . . inorganic materials together and makes them up into its own substance. The animal eats the plant and appropriates the nutritious portions to its own sustenance, rejects and gets rid of the useless matters; and, finally, the animal itself dies, and its whole body is decomposed and returned into the inorganic world. There is thus a constant circulation from one to the other, a continual formation of organic life from inorganic matters, and as constant a return of the matter of living bodies to the inorganic world; so that the materials of which our bodies are composed are largely, in all probability, the substances which constituted the matter of long extinct creations. (Man's Place in Nature, 158-9)

Aside from these scientific considerations the whole poetic tradition of the metamorphosis of people and animals into plant life is, of course, also an ancient one. Ovid, after all, for all his genius, merely recorded myths dating back to the beginning of time. Poets have made use of the conceit over and over as a means of finding consolation after the death of a loved one. To name just a few examples, the speaker of the medieval alliterative poem Pearl is soothed by the fragrance of the gillyflowers, ginger blossoms, and peonies, springing from seeds germinating in the pearl maiden's burial mound. Laertes, at Ophelia's graveside, exclaims: "Lay her i' th' earth, / And from her fair and unpolluted flesh / May violets spring!" (Hamlet V.i, 240-2). And Thomas Gray, in his famous elegy, describes the "rugged elms" and shady yew trees of the country churchyard under which are the moldering heaps where "[t]he rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

This long tradition achieves its ultimate expression in English poetry in Hardy's remarkable poem "Voices from

Things Growing in a Churchyard" (CP, 580). In spite of its length it should be quoted in its entirety in order to observe the subtle connections between its parts and to fully savor its mysterious vitality:

These flowers are I, poor Fanny Hurd,
Sir or Madam,
A little girl here sepultured.
Once I flit-fluttered like a bird
Above the grass as now I wave
In daisy shapes above my grave,
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

- I am one Bachelor Bowring, 'Gent',
Sir or Madam;
In shingled oak my bones were pent;
Hence more than a hundred years I spent
In my feat of change from a coffin-thrall
To a dancer in green leaves on a wall,
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

- I these berries of juice and gloss,
Sir or Madam,
Am clean forgotten as Thomas Voss;
Thin-urned I have burrowed away from the moss
That covers my sod, and have entered this yew, And
turned to clusters ruddy of view,
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

- The Lady Gertrude, proud, high-bred,
Sir or Madam,
Am I - this laurel that shades your head;
Into its veins I have stilly sped,
And made them of me; and my leaves now shine,
As did my satins superfine,
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

-I who as innocent withwind climb,
Sir or Madam,
Am one Eve Greensleeves, in olden time
Kissed by men from many a clime,
Beneath sun, stars, in blaze, in breeze,
As now by glowworms and by bees,
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

-I'm old Squire Audeley Grey, who grew,
Sir or Madam,

Aweary of life, and in scorn withdrew;
Till anon I clambered up anew
As ivy-green, when my ache was stayed,
And in that attire I have longtime gayed
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

- And so these maskers breathe to each
Sir or Madam
Who lingers there, and their lively speech
Affords an interpreter much to teach,
As their murmurous accents seem to come
Thence hitheraround in a radiant hum,
All day cheerily,
All night eerily!

A close reading of this poem reveals it to be a study in contrasts on two separate levels. First it portrays the differences between the characters and personalities of its subjects. Secondly it contrasts the quality and tempo of life before and after metamorphosis.

On the first count, the six subjects of the poem can be grouped for comparison and contrast into three pairs, the little girl and the old man whose monologues begin and end the series, the two men, and the two women, whose utterances occur in between. Unlike the framing couple, little Fanny Hurd and old Squire Grey, the middle two pairs have at least gender, and possibly age in common. Beyond that they sharply diverge. Bachelor Bowring and Thomas Voss, for example, are unlikely neighbors in the graveyard. One has been a man of wealth and prominence during life, the other a poor man of obscure origins. Yet, ironically, Bachelor Bowring's costly coffin of shingled oak becomes a rigid prison balking his liberating transformation into "a dancer in green leaves on a wall" for over a century. Meanwhile, his thin-urned fellow has successfully burrowed free from his flimsy cerements and has burgeoned far more expeditiously into new life as the ruddy fruit clusters of the yew tree.

Equally disparate are the two women, the cool, formal Lady Gertrude, proud of her noble birth, and her sensual,

yielding sister under the skin, Eve Greensleeves, "the handsome mother of two or three illegitimate children" according to Hardy's note. Appropriately enough Lady Gertrude's superfine satins become the stiff, lustrous leaves of the laurel tree after her transformation. The compliant Eve is changed, just as felicitously, to a supple vine whose fruitfulness, in the manner of the plant world, is now dependent upon her passive, and freshly innocent, submission to the kisses and caresses of pollinating insects.

But if the two framing speakers are juxtaposed in this way they appear the most oddly assorted pair of all. Fanny Hurd is a simple, unformed girl-child who during her brief time on earth "Flit-fluttered" happily like a bird as she played. Squire Grey is a world-weary old man embittered by life's pains. During life they represented the extremes of innocence and experience. Yet after their absorption into the vegetable kingdom they are strangely at one. The little girl flutters ebulliently in the daisy shapes on her grave, and the old man, his ache stayed at last, is free to cavort gaily in the attire of ivy-green.

By selecting such diverse characters and apposing them to bring out these contrasts Hardy depicts, in miniature, the color and heterogeneity of the human race as a whole. At the same time he contrasts the quality of life before and after transformation, showing the chief attractions of the latter state to be its dancing insouciance and its egalitarianism. Although each of these leafy avatars retain vestiges of the personality traits which distinguished them during life, the societal barriers which once would have segregated them one from the other seem strangely irrelevant after their metamorphosis. In fact they now seem to be enjoying a whole new level of carefree, companionable interaction:

> - And so these maskers breathe to each
> Sir or Madam.

The word "maskers" brings a note of playful impersonation to the life of this graveyard community. And the mock ceremoniousness with which they address their audience "Sir or Madam" seems to indicate that they are having fun in their foliar disguise at the expense of those visitors to the churchyard who fail to perceive their original identity. Tom Paulin calls their theatrics "the robust social comedy of the graveyard." But underlying its farcical elements he is aware of a "mysteriousness and an ecstatic energy" (104). These plants are vibrantly alive, and the "radiant hum" they emit is audible to those willing to linger and apprehend its human origins, now transmuted into the general life of growing things. Incidentally, although Hardy may not have been aware of it himself, his reference to the plants' breathing, coupled with his refrain: "All day cheerily, / All night eerily," curiously parallels the actual respiratory functions of the vegetable kingdom. By day plants purify the air by taking in waste gases and "cheerily' giving out healthy, life-supporting oxygen. By night, however, the process is "eerily" reversed as they inhale wholesome oxygen and exhale insalubrious carbon dioxide.

"Transformations," (CP, 410), although it lacks the lilting delicacy of "Voices from Things," is another arresting treatment of the theme. Kenneth Marsden, while admiring this poem, admits that it is "rather embarrassingly explicit" (68). However the blunt specificity with which it begins is tempered somewhat by the calm transcendence of its final stanza:

> Portion of this yew
> Is a man my grandsire knew,
> Bosomed here at its foot:
> This branch may be his wife,
> A ruddy human life
> Now turned to a green shoot.
>
> These grasses must be made
> Of her who often prayed,

Last century for repose;
And the fair girl long ago
Whom I often tried to know
May be entering this rose.

So, they are not underground,
But as nerves and veins abound
In the growths of upper air,
And they feel the sun and rain,
And the energy again
That made them what they were!

The metamorphosis of these individuals is nothing like the process whereby Ovid converts Daphne to a laurel tree and Adonis to a flower with the swiftness of time-lapse photography. Hardy's characters are transformed by minute degrees over a long period of time, reflecting far more accurately the biological facts. The man and wife of stanza one have taken three generation to become part of the yew tree. The woman whose murmured prayers are now the whispering of the wind in the grass has been dead since the previous century. Even the fair girl who was the speaker's contemporary lived "long ago." And it is far less certain that her transformation is as complete as those who died earlier. He speculates that she may, only now, be in the process of entering the rose.

Hardy's belief in the interconnection between all living things may account for at least one of the ambiguities at the core of this poem. This is the fact that the distinctions between animal life and vegetable life tend to blur at times. These people have become plants, but they are also still uncannily human. They possess nerves which enable them to feel, and veins through which energy pulses. Furthermore, the poem wavers back and forth between certainty and conjecture about the process of metamorphosis itself as a possibility. The fact that the man "is" and the praying woman "must be" transformed, but the wife and the fair girl only "may be" so, creates tensions which lead to uncertainty about whether or not this is actually happening.

Similarly problematical is the poem "Drummer Hodge" (CP, 60). While it is primarily about the senselessness of war it is probably the most poignant poem in which metamorphosis is also an element. The young soldier of the title, an unsophisticated native of rural Wessex, dies far from home in a foreign land for a cause he probably does not understand. Denied the consolation of burial at home among his forefathers, he is thrown uncoffined into a crude grave in the South African veldt:

> Yet portion of that unknown plain
> Will Hodge forever be;
> His homely Northern breast and brain
> Grow to some Southern tree,
> And strange-eyed constellations reign
> His stars eternally.

Here the equivocality surrounding all of Hardy's various afterlives is markedly present. The words "forever" and "eternally" indicate that Drummer Hodge has indeed gained immortality of a kind. But the fact that he becomes part of a foreign tree and not one of the familiar elms or yews of his homeland means that his transformation is less than a happy one.

Of course with all of its tentativeness the idea of continuing to exist as one's bodily elements are recycled in a closed ecological system does have the support of science to a degree, even though Hardy augments it with his own romantic embellishments in his poetry. Perhaps less verifiable by empirical means, yet equally real to Hardy, is another kind of afterlife, not in the world of nature precisely, but in the physical world of specific places and of man-made objects which become so steeped in the presences of those who have been closely associated with them during life that they exude their essences long after they are gone. Although the poems expressing this concept frequently contain images which merge and overlap with those in Hardy's ghost poems, they form, nevertheless, a distinct group of their own. Moreover it can be broken down again into three

subgroups, the first containing poems dealing with rather general subjects such as historical places and the famous figures connected with them; the second concerned more particularly with certain houses which still bear the imprint of those who once occupied them; the third, even more narrowly, describing personal objects which, after being handled on a daily basis by their owners, become impregnated by their essence.

Among poems belonging to the first, rather impersonal category is one named "Jezreel" (CP, 521), inspired by the capture of the Plain of Esdraelon in Palestine by English troops in 1918. Hardy, curious about whether the entering soldiers were aware that Esdraelon and the biblical Jezreel were one and the same, jotted down these lines very rapidly, describing it to his friend Mrs. Hennicker as "just a poem for the moment" (One Rare Fair Woman, 182). In it he evokes the confrontation between the prophet Elijah and the wayward King Ahab, and wonders if any trace of their powerful drama, enacted so long ago in that legendary place, lingers on to be apprehended by its modern-day conquerors.

> Did they catch as it were in a Vision at shut of the day -
> When their cavalry smote through the ancient Esdraelon Plain,
> And they crossed where the Tishbite stood before in his enemy's way -
> His gaunt mournful Shade as he bade the king haste off amain?

Or did the image of Jehu, "he who drove furiously," or of the notorious Queen Jezebel, "that proud Tyrian woman who painted her face," flash before the eyes of the conquering English soldiers? At least for Hardy the personalities of these biblical characters remained vivid enough to make their presences almost palpable so many centuries later.

"In the British Museum" (CP, 315) revivifies yet another biblical personage when a humble workman viewing the Elgin marbles becomes transfixed by a stone from a wall which he believes once echoed the voice of the Apostle Paul, "[a]

small gaunt figure with wasted features," preaching with evangelical fervor to the curious Athenians on Mars Hill. As he recalls those unforgettable words which once "[p]attered upon / That marble front, and were wide reflected" before vanishing, their author lives again for this man of vision and simple faith.

Drawing much closer to his own time in "At a House in Hampstead" (CP, 530), Hardy envisages the "umbraged ghost" of John Keats returning from his "drowse by the Seven famed Hills" to rue the changes wrought by encroaching urbanization around his old home in London. Yet in spite of those changes Hardy prefers to believe that Keats's vital spirit is more deeply entrenched in this place where he dwelt when at the height of his artistic power than in his actual burial site in the city where, weak and ill, he spent his final days:

> Pleasanter now it is to hold
> That here, where sang he, more of him
> Remains than where he, tuneless, cold,
> Passed to the dim.

Hardy was acutely sensitive to the traces left behind by former occupants on the dwellings they once inhabited. Sometimes he even found their spectral presences too obtrusive for comfort according to one of his observations:

> The worst of taking a furnished house is that the articles in the rooms are saturated with the thoughts and glances of others. (L&W, 270)

More frequently, however, as another note demonstrates, he was warmed by the knowledge that such traces had been left behind by real people going about their daily lives, and were therefore to be treasured far above the random manifestations of nature:

> An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists, and mountains are

> unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand. (L&W, 120)

Wear and tear and grime inevitably result when human beings live in, use, and enjoy their environment from day to day, and Hardy certainly does not share Hopkins's puristic dismay at the thought that in this world of ours "all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil; / And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell" ("God's Grandeur," ll. 6-7). These lines suggest an aversion on Hopkins's part to the sensual aspects of man's nature. But Hardy realizes that the world can only be perceived by the senses, and by touching, and sensing the objects in it in other ways, we cannot escape making some impact upon it. J. Hillis Miller, captures Hardy's far less arid view of this phenomenon in a beautiful simile describing how, in certain of his poems, people instill "their lives into the physical objects they have used, so transforming them that the objects remain permeated with their presence and can liberate them in after years like an aroma freed from a sealed vase" (Distance and Desire, 97).

Because of their human connections these poems mostly reflect Hardy's warm, close-up vision of life. Some of them, like "During Wind and Rain" discussed earlier, have an ubi sunt quality about them. One of these, "The House of Hospitalities" (CP, 156), expresses a gentle feeling of nostalgia for lost family and friends and the simple festivities enjoyed with them long ago:

> Here we broached the Christmas barrel,
> Pushed up the charred log-ends;
> Here we sang the Christmas carol,
> And called in friends.
>
> Time has tired me since we met here
> When the folks now dead were young,
> Since the viands were outset here
> And the quaint songs sung.
>
> And the worm has bored the viol

That used to lead the tune,
Rust eaten out the dial
That struck night's noon.

Now no Christmas brings in neighbours,
And the New Year comes unlit;
Where we sang the mole now labours,
And the spiders knit.

Yet at midnight if here walking,
When the moon sheets wall and tree,
I see forms of old time talking,
Who smile on me.

In this, as in a number of other poems, the speaker is the sole survivor of what was formerly a group of friends. In "the Five Students" for example, he is the only one left still stalking the course. In "Under High-Stoy Hill" he is the last of a circle of friends, and he admits to being "brow-lined" himself. In "Looking Across" the one remaining group member, complaining: "Tired, tired am I / Of this earthly air," longs to follow those who predeceased him into the grave. In this poem, however, although the speaker admits that Time has tired him also, the mood is mellower. Instead of wishing for his own death as a means of rejoining his friends, he brings those "forms of old time" back to shadowy life as the impressions they have made on the old house become materially visible and audible to him. He actually sees their ghostly presences and hears them talking to each other as of old, and they greet their living companion with beneficent smiles as he recollects the good times they once shared.

There are other houses, however, on which the marks are imprinted of past events so tragic that they have a malign effect on later occupants. This is the case in "The Re-Enactment" (CP, 301), in which a woman, waiting for her lover in a dwelling she has rented for their tryst, is overcome by the vibrations from a disastrous love affair once enacted there. Discerning that "here some mighty passion / Once had burned / Which still the walls enghosted," her own

feebler romance is stifled by the potency of those past events. She discovers that it is:

> As if the intenser drama
> Shown me there
> Of what the walls had witnessed
> Filled the air,
> And left no room for later passion anywhere.

Strangely enough, not all individuals possess psychic antennae sensitive enough to pick up these transmissions from the past no matter how strong they might be. In at least two poems Hardy makes a clear distinction between the receptive and the unreceptive in this respect. One of these, "The House of Silence" (CP, 413), is a dialogue between two individuals, an older man, a seer, and a child who fails to perceive what lies behind his surface impressions of a quiet old house which appears to be deserted:

> 'That is a quiet place -
> That house in the trees with the shady lawn.'
> '- If, child, you knew what there goes on
> You would not call it a quiet place.
> Why, a phantom abides there, the last of its race
> And a brain spins there till dawn.'
>
> 'But I see nobody there, -
> Nobody moves about the green,
> Or wanders the heavy trees between.'
> '- Ah, that's because you do not bear
> The visioning powers of souls who dare
> To pierce the material screen,
>
> 'Morning, noon, and night,
> mid those funereal shades that seem
> The uncanny scenery of a dream,
> Figures dance to a mind with sight,
> And music and laughter like floods of light
> Make all the precincts gleam.
>
> 'It is a poet's bower,
> Through which there pass, in fleet arrays,
> Long teams of all the years and days,
> Of joys and sorrows of earth and heaven,
> That meet mankind in its ages seven,
> An aion in an hour.'

Pinion is convincing in his discussion of this poem when he concludes that its phantom is Hardy himself at Max Gate:

> 'the last of its race' refers to his childlessness and that of his unmarried brother and sisters. He lives less in his surroundings than in his imagination, which evokes people, joyful or sad, at all stages of life; 'its ages seven' refers to Shakespeare's seven ages of man (137).

The heavy screen of trees in the poem is indeed reminiscent of the densely wooded grounds surrounding Max Gate, and the fact that the occupant of the house is both a poet and a phantom would support Pinion's conclusion, for as I have noted earlier, Hardy took grim pleasure in picturing himself as a ghost, a fly on the wall as it were, observing the passing scene without being observed himself.

If Hardy is in fact one of the partners in this dialogue he preempts the major part of the poem for his own point of view, claiming 19 of its 24 lines for himself and allowing the child only five. He chooses a child as the antiphonal voice, perhaps because of its immaturity and unfulfilled potential, to symbolize any ordinary individual of scant imagination and dull sensibility. This particular child observes no sight, sound, nor movement which would indicate human presence in the vicinity of the house. His vision is further restricted by the oppressive darkness of the place; the lawn is shady, the trees are heavy, and the shades funereal. To the phantom poet, on the other hand, all is movement and light. Gifted with a supernatural sensitivity he experiences a synesthesia in which the sounds of music and laughter, and the sight of dancing figures, are fused and suffused with floods of light which make "all the precincts gleam" with vitality. But to enjoy these transcendent "visioning powers" the poet must take a risk. He must "dare" to free his imagination to pierce the phenomenological barrier erected by the gross physical senses. The chance he takes is losing touch with reality.

But if he succeeds, the seer becomes aware that this seemingly silent, deserted house is filled with haunting presences from the past.

If the buoyant rhythm of this poem highlights its representation of the lively vision of a seer with the extra-sensory perception to detect the traces imprinted on his environment by former beings, the uninspired meter and monochromatic tone of "A House with a History" (CP, 602) signal that this is a poem about newcomers to a house who are too crass and self-centered to perceive such phenomena:

> There is a house in a city street
> Some past ones made their own;
> Its floors were criss-crossed by their feet,
> And their babblings beat
> From ceiling to white hearth-stone.
>
> And who are peopling its parlours now?
> Who talk across its floor?
> Mere freshlings are they, blank of brow,
> Who read not how
> Its prime had passed before
>
> Their raw equipments, scenes and says
> Afflicted its memoried face,
> That had seen every larger phase
> Of human ways
> Before these filled the place.
>
> To them the house's tale is theirs,
> No former voices call
> Aloud therein. Its aspect bears
> Their joys and cares
> Alone, from wall to wall.

The prosiness of the poem, which worsens after the extremely awkward enjambment linking stanzas two and three, accentuates the unimaginativeness of the blank-browed mere freshlings who now occupy the house. So blunted is their super-sensory acuity that they neither read the rich history imprinted on the walls of the house, nor hear the voices of former dwellers, even though they are there to be heard calling "[a]loud therein."

The list of the newcomers failings which so afflict the "memoried face" of the old house is a study in synonyms. "[E]quipments," for example, may mean not only the physical trappings with which they furnish their home, the dictionary also defines the word as "mental or emotional traits or resources," and if these are unseasoned or underdeveloped it represents a lack far more serious than if "raw equipments" applied merely to their crude material possessions. Their "scenes" too, of course, could just apply to the domestic background against which their lives are played out, but it may also mean that they are prone to staging ugly displays of anger. Similarly the noun "says" may be used here in its archaic sense meaning simply the statements they make, but it also carries the connotation of "having one's say," perhaps in an outspoken or opinionated manner. Finally the words "phase" and "aspect," which are generally regarded as near-synonyms, have been juxtaposed here only to be pushed as far apart in meaning as possible. Before these newcomers arrived the house had "seen every larger phase / Of human ways" (emphasis added.) In other words it had witnessed, from every conceivable angle, life lived to the full by individuals of sensitivity and insight. Now, unfortunately, it bears only the limited "aspect," or the superficial thoughts and emotions, of occupants too obtuse to sense the history with which their ambiance is saturated. Given all these negative connotations, it is no wonder that the house, accustomed as it is to gentler residents, should be blighted by the presence of these brash new people.

Hardy's most complex analysis of this kind of imprinting as a form of afterlife occurs in "The Two Houses" (CP, 549), a poem notable for its form as well as its content. Denouncing the liberties sometimes taken by a younger generation of poets Hardy once wrote that poetry must have both "symmetry in its form and meaning in its content" (One Rare Fair Woman, 178). By form I believe that he meant not only meter and rhyme, but also shape, or pattern on the page.

In this particular poem regularity of meter is actually sacrificed in order to create its striking visual symmetry, achieved by lengthening each succeeding line in each of its fourteen stanzas to form roughly triangular blocks of print stacked one above the other somewhat like a stylized drawing of a pine tree. However, as Dennis Taylor points out, Hardy's shaped stanzas are not to be confused with true technopaignic verse, like Herbert's "Easter Wings," in which the shape of the poem imitates its subject matter. In contrast, the visual forms of Hardy's poems, while they create a mood, have no special meanings in themselves (Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody, 189-91).

After a brief introduction "The Two Houses" becomes another of Hardy's dialogues, although not between people in this case but between an anthropomorphic old house and its brand new next-door neighbor. Like the conversation in "The House of Silence" this one also gives unequal weight to its speakers, with the old house given more than three times the number of lines allotted to the new. It begins:

In the heart of night,
When farers were not near,
The left house said to the house on the right,
'I have marked your rise, O smart newcomer here.'

This relatively innocuous opening statement by the old house provokes a condescending riposte from the "cold-eyed" new one:

'Newcomer here I am,
Hence haler than you with your cracked old hide,
Loose casements, wormy beams, and doors that jam.

'Modern my wood,
My hangings fair of hue;
While my windows open as they should,
And water-pipes thread all my chambers through.

'Your gear is gray,
Your face wears furrows untold.'

Unvexed by this rudeness the old house mournfully agrees that its appearance and condition do leave much to be desired, but it warns its neighbor that it too would be the worse for wear were it packed with ghostly "Presences from aforetime" instead of standing as it does raw and new, "[v]oid as a drum," a veritable tabula rasa possessing "no sense of the have-beens." After silencing its neighbor with this retort the old house continues to describe at length how its character has been stamped by all the lives that have been lived out in it over the years. Babies who have been born in it "obsess" its rooms. Those who have died there still throng its chambers. "Dancers and singers . . . the learned in love-lore and the dunce," brides and grooms of the past, all are still throbbing presences there as they were of old. Yet once again the poem makes clear that many new tenants "with souls unwoke" are unaware of these "sylph-like surrounders." For the perceptive, however, these "thin elbowers" have imbued the old house with their own human characteristics:

'Where such inbe,
A dwelling's character
Takes theirs, and a vague semblancy
To them in all its limbs, and light, and
atmosphere.

In contrast the new house is merely a lifeless "heap of stick and stone." After learning the old house's colorful history, the awestricken newcomer asks if the day will come when it too will become impregnated with the distilled spirits of its own "spectral guests." The old house sagely replies:

'- That will it boy;
Such shades will people thee,
Each in his misery, irk, or joy,
And print on thee their presences as on me.

In the final subcategory of this group it becomes clear that, just as legendary places and time-mellowed houses

become steeped in the human characteristics of those once associated with them, so do objects on a smaller scale, particularly personal possessions used by individuals in every-day life. In "The Little Old Table" (CP, 609), for example, a piece of furniture comes to life to voice its own history:

> Creak, little wood thing, creak,
> When I touch you with elbow or knee;
> That is the way you speak
> Of one who gave you to me!
>
> You, little table, she brought -
> Brought me with her own hand,
> As she looked at me with a thought
> That I did not understand.
>
> - Whoever owns it anon,
> And hears it, will never know
> what a history hangs upon
> This creak from long ago.

Pinion guesses that this was a table given to Hardy by his mother for his boyhood studies (186). If this is the case the poem was probably written some time after her death in 1904, as it first appeared in Late Lyrics and Earlier published in 1922. This piece of furniture, humble though it is, acts as a medium permitting the poet to communicate with a deceased loved one. Touching it intimately "with elbow or knee" as he works at it on a daily basis, causes the creak which elicits a flood of memories of its giver. If at the time of receiving the table he was puzzled by her enigmatic look and the thought that lay behind it, perhaps he now understands its meaning. In any case, the fact that the reader is unenlightened about what her thought was at the time adds a teasing touch of mystery to an otherwise slight little poem. The final stanza reiterates the familiar concept that this kind of contact with the dead through physical objects is not open to all. What is an evocative human voice to the present owner of the table will be nothing

more than an annoying creak reminding some future owner of its age and rickety condition.

While some readers may have difficulty imagining that one can hear the pleasing intonations of a human voice in the harsh squeaking of an old table, few could fail to be charmed by the melodious voices heard in "Haunting Fingers" (CP, 546), a fantasy set in a museum for old musical instruments. And if it is suggested briefly that the poet must touch his old work table to give it speech in the last poem, the essentiality of human touch to the voices of these musical instruments is a central concern in this far more complex poem. The word "fingers" in its title signals the fact that this is a poem rich in tactile imagery. Only by being touched can these instruments speak. Yet the fact that they are rare, fragile antiques, worthy of preservation in a museum, would virtually preclude their being touched. As the poem begins, the instruments, half drowsing in the dead of night mourn the fact that the death of those who once played them has doomed them to a similar "voiceless, crippled, corpselike state" as their former owners are experiencing. But miraculously, as bright memories of their music-making days return, they begin to feel again the ghostly touch of those musicians of old upon them bringing them back to life:

> And they felt past handlers on them,
> Though none was in the room,
> Old players' dead fingers touch them,
> Shrunk in the tomb.

A "contra-basso" begins reliving the days when it used to "thrill / The populace through and through, / Wake them to passioned pulsings past their will." A harpsichord, recalling how, under the "tender pat" of its player's "aery finger-tips," it once produced sounds "so sweet no lover could withstand," feels those gentle fingerings once more upon its keyboard:

> And its clavier was filmed with fingers

Like tapering flames - wan, cold -
Or the nebulous light that lingers
In a charnel mould.

Other instruments, stroked and caressed by amorphous hands, join in to play again the kind of music for which they were created. A drum reverberates in the same spirited manner as it did when it stirred "regiments, marchings, throngs, hurrahs!" An "aged viol" feels again the "apt touches" of the musician who elicited from it gay tunes to "spur the dance." An ancient woodwind evokes the same mood of "holy calm" its "Cecilian rhythms" produced "when hymn and psalm / Poured from devout souls met in Sabbath sanctitude." A "sick lyre" which once "faced the sock / Nightly," twangs out its vaudevillian melodies just as it did when it provided the accompaniment for charming scenes "of life in mock" feeding the powerful emotions of "love, hope, wit, rapture, mirth, [and], desire!"[3]

This poem, like so many of Hardy's most successful creations, is one in which eros and thanatos intersect and interact to give it depth as well as breadth. On the one hand, the instruments boast of their power to awaken "passioned pulsings." They arouse desire. They create sounds irresistible to lovers. But in order to do this they must first be aroused themselves by the fingers of the dead, fingers now "[s]hrunk in the tomb," with an appearance as filmy as the nebulous light "that lingers / In a charnel mould." Both of these contrary elements are deftly blended in the line describing the fingers on the harpsichord's keyboard as being like "tapering flames - wan, cold." The word "flames" normally suggests the color, heat, and light associated with life. But the sickly pallor and coldness of

[3] Although this poem may owe nothing to Dryden's "A song for St. Cecilia's Day" it is interesting to note some striking resemblances between the two works. Both contain a catalog of musical instruments. Both cover the wide range of emotions capable of being aroused by different kinds of music. Both suggest that music can either raise or quell passion. And both contain allusions to St. Cecilia, the patroness of music, and to mythical musicians such as Orpheus and Amphion.

these flames invite thoughts of death. The eerie mergence of these two states deepens the impact of this seemingly simple phrase.

In a somewhat analogous manner the afterlives of both the ghostly musicians and the instruments imprinted by them are intertwined and interdependent. Without each other neither could relive the glory of the past. But once again, this is an afterlife as evanescent as the night. The final stanza describes how the fantasy ended bleakly at dawn as little by little:

> . . . each past player
> Stroked thinner and more thin,
> And the morning sky grew grayer
> and day crawled in.

If there should be any doubt that Hardy is at his most endearingly warm and human when his vision is fixed on the homely objects and simple activities of everyday life, the lovely poem "Old Furniture" (CP, 428), should dispel it. This too is a poem intense in its tactility. Its speaker describes how the presences of the dead, interfused with the patina of the things they once used, appear to him like hands still lovingly fondling those ancient surfaces:

> I see the hands of the generations
> That owned each shiny familiar thing
> In play on its knobs and indentations,
> And with its ancient fashioning
> Still dallying:
>
> Hands behind hands, growing paler and paler,
> As in a mirror a candle-flame
> Shows images of itself, each frailer
> As it recedes, though the eye may frame
> Its shape the same.

He sees a "foggy finger" moving, with the tentative touch "of a moth on a summer night," across the face of an old clock to adjust the time. Fingers seem to be dancing over the strings of an old violin. A face seen by firelight at the tinder box glows forth momentarily then fades away again.

Fragility and transience, as always, accompany this kind of afterlife. Images come and go. Hands grow paler and paler as they recede back through the generations. Perhaps because Hardy's afterlives are flawed by the limitations inherent in our mortal condition, he compensates by providing us with a multiplicity of them, scaled down to human size, from which to choose. They are like the array of colors, less candescent maybe, but beautiful in their own way, that appear when the white light of eternity is passed through the prism of life. Hardy transmutes these colors into poetry to express the many imperfect yet consoling ways we seek to extend our being beyond the grave.

CHAPTER 6

The Death and the Afterlife of Emma Hardy

A great deal has been written about the profound effect upon Hardy of the sudden death of his first wife and the outpouring of poems which stemmed from it. Beside the unparalleled elegiac sequence "Poems of 1912-13," generally considered his crowning achievement, there are around one hundred lesser-known poems associated with Emma Hardy. During the two years following her death Hardy claims to have written more prolifically than at any comparable period of time. He was "in flower" during these days but "his flower was sad-coloured" (L&W, 389). Hardy's flood of grief and devotion would seem somewhat paradoxical given the bitterness and estrangement that marked the latter part of his marriage. But through the magic of memory he was able to conjure Emma up in his mind restored to the young woman with whom he had first fallen in love. Shortly after her death he wrote to a friend: "One forgets all the recent years & differences, & goes back to the early times when each was much to the other--in her case & mine intensely much" (Selected Letters, 260).

As Dennis Taylor observes, Hardy, like Jocelyn Pierson in his novel The Well-Beloved, was "controlled by a romantic image . . . that was forty years old" but "which had persisted long after the couple themselves had changed" (Hardy's Poetry, 23). While writing that early novel Hardy scarcely could have realized that his words concerning Pierston would be so prophetic of his own emotional response to the death of a loved one:

> He loved the woman dead and inaccessible as he had never loved her in life . . . it was love rarefied and, refined to its highest attar. (113-14)

Philip Larkin, describing the effect upon Hardy of finding and reading his wife's memoir, Some Recollections, after her death, writes:

> Not till his first wife had died could Hardy's love poetry for her be written, and then it was mixed with a flood of regret and remorse for what he had lost. This kind of paradox is inseparable from poetic creation. (147)

So death was his muse. But while Emma's death may at first appear the dominant strand in this body of work that of the afterlife is actually present in equal proportion. Moreover a careful reading reveals that in these poems Hardy has immortalized his wife in virtually every one of the multiple ways available to him. In fact of the ten kinds of Hardyan afterlife I have posited to this point I believe the only one with which he has failed to endow her is perpetuation through producing offspring. The Hardys were childless after all. If all the other versions of life beyond the grave are considered as substrands or plies twisted together to form the general skein of the afterlife, they are intertwined here far more firmly and inseparably than anywhere else, enriching the color, texture, and quality of Hardy's poetic tapestry.

Looking first of all at death as a state of consciousness, I have proposed earlier that, depending on Hardy's mood at the moment of writing, whether observing the world with his pessimistic hawk's-eye vision, or regarding it from his closer, more sanguine perspective, death can range from profound unconsciousness, through deep to more fitful states of slumber, to a ghostly existence like a paler form of real life, in which the dead are capable of feeling, observing, moving from place to place, and even of attempting to communicate with the living. Studying the poems dedicated to Emma Hardy one finds that she passes through all these phases of consciousness at various times, sometimes even moving from one to the other in the same poem. Take, for

example, the most hauntingly desolate poem in the 1912-13 sequence, "The Voice" (CP, 285). As the poem moves from the speaker's tentative hope of reunion with his lost love, through his deepening sense of disillusion, to his ultimate recognition of the irreversibility of his loss, the ghostly caller becomes more and more disembodied, and her consciousness deadens:

> Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
> Saying that now you are not as you were
> When you had changed from the one who was all to me,
> But as at first when our day was fair.
>
> Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you then,
> Standing as when I drew near to the town
> Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
> Even to the original air-blue gown!

In stanza one the poet believes that Emma's ghost is actively communicating with him, telling him how death has restored her to the woman she was in their idyllic early years together. But in the second stanza declarative statement gives way to question as he begins to doubt the reliability of his auditory powers. "Can it be you that I hear?" he asks her. Then, like the biblical Thomas, he demands the corroboration of a second percept, a visual image of his love, in order to be able to suspend disbelief that it is she. "Let me view you then," he asks, stipulating that she appear in the youthful configuration she claims to have regained, "[e]ven to the original air-blue gown." This line echoes Hardy's description of his meeting with Emma on his second trip to Cornwall:

> Here . . . he found the "young lady in brown" of the previous winter . . . metamorphosed into a young lady in summer blue. (L&W, 81)

However as the "summer blue" attire of the memoir thins to the "air-blue" gown of the poem, its wearer's ghostly presence becomes correspondingly rarefied and more difficult to substantiate. In stanza three the speaker's hopes for spiritual communion with his lost love diminish even further.

> Or is it only the breeze in its listlessness
> Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
> You being ever dissolved to wan wistlessness,
> Heard from no more again far or near?

He realizes now, that what he first perceived as her voice, may be no more than the listless sighing of the wind as it blows across the meadow. As his disappointment deepens, the apparition dissolves "to wan wistlessness" and her plaintive voice fades away. Jean Brooks glosses the strangely beautiful coinage "wistlessness" as "a state of being without knowing" (84). In other words, the phantom consciously communicating with the speaker in stanza one, arousing within him memories of happier times, has drifted into a state of mental oblivion herself as his mood darkens and his belief in her reality gradually dwindles. The brief, fragmentary sentences of the wrenching final stanza are the broken utterances of one fully cognizant at last of the magnitude and permanence of his loss:

> Thus I; faltering forward,
> Leaves around me falling,
> Wind oozing thin through the thorn from
> norward,
> And the woman calling.

In contrast to the downward movement in "The Voice" a movement upward from despair to qualified hope marks "I Found Her Out There" (CP, 281). Yet the two poems are similar in that, in each of them, the degree of the subject's awareness rises or falls with the mood of the speaker. The first two stanzas establish the sensual, psychological, and topographical differences between "there" (Cornwall where

the speaker found his beloved) and "here" (Dorset to where he brought her and finally laid her to rest):

> I found her out there
> On a slope few see,
> That falls westwardly
> To the salt-edged air,
> Where the ocean breaks
> On the purple strand,
> And the hurricane shakes
> The solid land.
>
> I brought her here,
> And have laid her to rest
> In a noiseless nest
> No sea beats near.
> She will never be stirred
> In her loamy cell
> By the waves long heard
> And loved so well.

The description of the Cornish coast in stanza one is filled with color, odor, sound, and motion. The strand is purple, the air is edged with the salty tang of the sea. And the sound of the waves breaking, and the sensation of the wind violently shaking the land, which bring the locality to life so vividly, also animate the memory of the girl who once loved it.

Conversely, this kind of life-affirming imagery is either absent from the description of Dorset, or couched in negative terms. Emma lies motionless in a noiseless grave. No sound of breaking waves will arouse her from the deep slumber of death. This is a world of stasis, arid, and devoid of all sensory stimuli. Because Emma, like Drummer Hodge, is interred in alien soil her afterlife is a tragic one of deprivation and isolation from her natural environment. She is asleep, but in the wrong place:

> So she does not sleep
> By those haunted heights
> The Atlantic smites
> And the blind gales sweep,
> Whence she often would gaze
> At Dundagel's famed head,

While the dipping blaze
Dyed her face fire-red.

Implicit in these lines is the thought that, were Emma buried where she belonged, her afterlife would be far less torpid. Her consciousness and vitality would be awakened amid the flaming color and kinetic energy of her familiar, loved surroundings. The final stanza brings with it a tentative sense of closure as the speaker speculates that Emma's journey could, perhaps, come full circle if, aroused from her torpor, she could return to Cornwall as a ghost, capable of moving toward, then hearing, and finally reveling once more in the sound of her beloved western sea:

Yet her shade, maybe,
Will creep underground
Till it catch the sound
Of that western sea
As it swells and sobs
Where she once domiciled,
And joy in its throbs
With the heart of a child.

Quite naturally Hardy prefers to imagine his dead wife as a lively ghost rather than as a cold, comatose entity in the grave. By choosing to grant her this kind of afterlife he hopes to decrease the distance which separates them. At her most alert Emma actually becomes the speaker of the poem on occasion, as in "His Visitor" (CP, 286), in which she rises from the grave to revisit the home she shared with her husband for over twenty years. However, the alterations that have taken place under new domestic management sadden her:

The change I notice in my once own quarters!
A formal-fashioned border where the daisies used to be,
The rooms new painted, and the pictures altered,
And other cups and saucers, and no cosy nook for tea
As with me.

I discern the dim faces of the sleep-wrapt servants;
They are not those who tended me through feeble hours
and strong,
But strangers quite, who never knew my rule here,
Who never saw me painting, never heard my softling song

Float along.

So although Hardy may long to draw his dead wife home again in ghostly form he may be doing her a disservice. As a ghost she has the power to feel. However, as what she feels is not the joy of reunion, but an uneasy sense of exclusion from her rightful place, of having been superseded by strangers, and of being a superfluous presence there, consciousness merely causes her pain. She decides therefore to renounce it for the dormancy and silence of the tomb. Vowing never to return she heads back to Mellstock churchyard where she will "rejoin the roomy silence, and the mute and manifold / Souls of old."

Living on as a ghost, in this case, appears less desirable than continuing in total oblivion. Here, as always, Hardy constructs a kind of afterlife only to deconstruct it by showing its weaknesses. He does this again in "The Haunter" (CP, 284), in which Emma's phantom is once more the speaker, although only to acknowledge the futility of any attempt at real communication between the living and the dead. It begins:

> He does not think that I haunt here nightly:
> How shall I let him know
> That whither his fancy sets him wandering
> I, too, alertly go?
> Hover and hover a few feet from him
> Just as I used to do,
> But cannot answer the words he lifts me -
> Only listen thereto!
>
> When I could answer he did not say them:
> When I could let him know
> How I would like to join in his journeys
> Seldom he wished to go.
> Now that he goes and wants me with him
> More than he used to do,
> Never he sees my faithful phantom
> Though he speaks thereto.

Death here to Emma is a one-way glass wall separating her from her husband, transparent from her viewpoint, opaque from

his. She can see him and hear him speaking tenderly to her as he failed to do when she could reply. He can neither see nor hear her although he now longs to as never before.

Stanza three, the most poignantly beautiful of the poem, shows the spiritual proximity of the haunter to the haunted, but, ironically, as she shadows him trying fruitlessly to speak to him, he, mindless of her presence, wanders perplexedly searching for her:

> Yes, I companion him to places
> Only dreamers know,
> Where the shy hares print long paces,
> Where the night rooks go;
> Into old aisles where the past is all to him,
> Close as his shade can do,
> Always lacking the power to call to him,
> Near as I reach thereto!

In the final stanza, the frustrated haunter turns to a third party, the reader, to intercede and reassure her bereaved husband of her faithful, continuing presence:

> What a good haunter I am, O tell him!
> Quickly make him know
> If he but sigh since my loss befell him
> Straight to his side I go.

Somehow, one is left with the impression that the message is never transmitted, and that even though ghostliness may be the state of being beyond the grave closest to life, no real union between the dead and the living is ever possible.

Sadly, the wall of death is a permanent continuation of the wall of estrangement which rose between Hardy and his wife during their marriage. His remorse at allowing it to separate them when it could have been penetrated is a recurring motif in the poetry. Hardy sometimes referred to the "Poems of 1912-13" as "an expiation" (Purdy, Bibliographic Study, 166). And I believe that the only way he could makes amends for what he perceived as past neglect was to attempt to immortalize Emma with all the tools at his

command, in other words, to bestow upon her as many versions of his poetic afterlife as could possibly apply to her.

Some of the most remarkable poems in the sequence were inspired by Hardy's nostalgic return to Cornwall several months after his wife's death to revisit the scenes of their courtship. It was an extremely painful experience for Hardy, but out of that pain issued a flood of creativity which, channeled into poetry, would immortalize Emma in a way unequaled in the long elegiac tradition.

Because all the elements which recur in Hardy's poetic oeuvre converge in this sequence, it is not surprising that his enmity with Time should be a predominant theme. Just as predictable is the inclusion of the one kind of afterlife calculated to outwit Time. That is escaping from the flux into eternity. This is the central contention of "At Castle Boterel" (CP, 292). In its first two stanzas the poet, aged, alone, and grieving, is making a second pilgrimage, in inclement weather, to a spot first visited with Emma many years earlier. In contrast, the weather on that first occasion was fine, the pair were young, inseparable, and in the first bloom of love. Somehow, through the necromancy of memory, he is able to resurrect the original scene in all its freshness, as if it were still happening today:

> As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,
> And the drizzle bedrenches the wagonette,
> I look behind at the fading byway,
> And see on its slope, now glistening wet,
> Distinctly yet
>
> Myself and a girlish form benighted
> In dry March weather. We climb the road
> Beside a chaise. We had just alighted
> To ease the sturdy pony's load
> When he sighed and slowed.[1]

[1] Although conditions on the two trips were vastly different this moment is memorable because the couple's consideration for the plight of the overburdened pony firmly links past and present. No matter how radically all else had changed over the years their mutual concern for the welfare of animals remained constant. In a letter to Mrs. Hennicker shortly after his wife's death, Hardy stated that her "courage in the cause of animals was truly admirable, surpassing that of any other woman I have ever known"

As the poet relives the past he dismisses as unimportant the exact nature of what was literally done and said so long ago. All the minutiae have been distilled into a quintessential moment of vision far beyond word or gesture:

> What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
> Matters not much, nor to what it led, -
> Something that life will not be balked of
> Without rude reason till hope is dead,
> And feeling fled.
>
> It filled but a minute. But was there ever
> A time of such quality, since or before,
> In that hill's story? To one mind never,
> Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
> By thousands more.

So intense is the quality of the moment that it detaches itself from the temporal past and passes into the sphere of the infinite and the eternal. Trevor Johnson is convinced that "[t]his is a new idea, a new defiance of Time--that the quality of the moment is immortal" (Thomas Hardy, 81). Elsewhere, culling an apt phrase from Henry Vaughan, Johnson sees Hardy asserting here that "Love can confer upon a moment of time . . . 'bright shoots of everlastingness'" ("Ancestral Voices," 59). In stanzas five and six, the "unflinching rigour" of the old enemy Time is openly challenged. The substance of this past experience may have vanished, but its essence remains eternally present in nature, beyond all that is passing:

> Primaeval rocks form the roads steep border,
> And much have they faced there, first and last,
> Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
> But what they record in colour and cast
> Is - that we two passed.
>
> And as to me, though Time's unflinching rigour,
> In mindless rote, has ruled from sight

(One Rare Fair Woman, 155). Hardy's own devotion to the cause is well documented.

The substance now, one phantom figure
Remains on the slope, as when that night
Saw us alight.

Yet, to apprehend the priceless moment, the poet must pluck it out of eternity and return it to Time for as long as he is able, by holding it in his memory. As memory fades, the vision shrinks away, and he must resign himself once more to his loss:

I look and I see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again.

If, as I have suggested earlier, a posthumous escape from time into eternity is a consequence of Hardy's wide, universal view of reality, and an afterlife in the memory of the living an outgrowth of his close-up perspective, the superimposition of the two in "The Phantom Horsewoman" (CP, 294) creates an image, unsurpassed in its sharpness and immediacy, of Emma preserved in both these ways, as the fearless young rider of the Hardys' courtship days. It begins with the real Hardy stepping out of the frame of the poem and, viewing his own entranced body from afar, speaking of himself in the third person:

I
Queer are the ways of a man I know:
He comes and stands
In a careworn craze,
And looks at the sands
And the seaward haze
With moveless hands
And face and gaze,
Then turns to go . . .
And what does he see when he gazes so?

Although the second stanza continues in the ostensibly distancing third person, it quickly closes in on what is clearly the poet's purely personal vision of his beloved,

recreated in a memory so "[w]arm, real, and keen," that she is vividly alive once more in his imagination:

II
They say he sees as an instant thing
More clear than today,
A sweet soft scene
That was once in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring -
A phantom of his own figuring.

The word "instant" in the first line of this stanza is probably used in the sense of unmediated. In other words, the phantom is perceived in such clarity that it is as if no time, space, or substance has intervened between past and present. In fact the past is etched so deeply on the poet's memory that its influence affects every moment of his present life whether he is at the scene of the original experience or anywhere else:

Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain - day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose-bright -

The image, drawn "rose-bright" on the air is adrift, beyond time and space in the eternal and the infinite. But it must be plucked back into time and restored to the poet's memory to be fully animated.

Keeping a loved one alive in memory does have certain advantages over other kinds of immortalizing measures because one actually can select which memories to retain. And here the poet chooses to keep only the best of his beloved refined in his brain to the image of the fearless young horsewoman so dear to him before their love faded. Although he, still trapped in time continues to age, she remains perennially fresh and young. He sees her now only as:

IV
A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
he withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his wrapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.

But if an afterlife in the memory of the living has the advantage of allowing this kind of selectivity it also has its problematical aspects. For one thing, the way in which one is remembered has a pronounced effect on the quality of that form of perpetuation after death. And as I have attempted to demonstrate, the range of emotions elicited in the living as they think about the dead is wide indeed. Not only do these attitudes vary from one individual to another, but each individual must pass through his or her own series of conflicting emotions before coming to terms with the death of a loved one. That this is true of Hardy is abundantly clear in the Emma poems. "The Going" (CP, 277), which opens the elegiac sequence, is a gripping study in the poet's kaleidoscopic shifts of feeling under the initial impact of his bereavement. It begins on an almost querulous note:

Why did you give no hint that night
That quickly after the morrow's dawn,
And calmly, as if indifferent quite,
You would close your term here, up and be gone
Where I could not follow
With wing of swallow
To gain one glimpse of you ever anon!

Never to bid good-bye,
Or lip me the softest call,
Or utter a wish for a word, while I
Saw morning harden upon the wall,
Unmoved, unknowing
That your great going
Had place that moment, and altered all.

In these stanzas the poet oscillates back and forth between shocked bewilderment at his wife's unexpected departure, and a sense of grievance at her careless lack of consideration in failing to warn him of what was impending. At the same time he moves from ignorance of, to a full realization of, the enormity of his loss.

There are times, however, when a flash of memory all but blinds Hardy to this realization. In his reply to Mrs. Hennicker's letter of condolence, he writes:

> The saddest moments of all are when I go into the garden and to that long straight walk at the top that you know, where she used to walk every evening just before dusk, the cat trotting faithfully behind her; and at times when I almost expect to see her as usual coming in from the flower-beds with a little trowel in her hand. (One Rare Fair Woman, 155)

He distills this experience into verse in stanza three, in which he once more reproaches Emma for allowing memory to almost deceive him into denial of the "yawning blankness" of her absence:

> Why do you make me leave the house
> And think for a breath it is you I see
> At the end of the alley of bending boughs
> Where so often at dusk you used to be;
> Till in darkening dankness
> The yawning blankness
> Of the perspective sickens me!

Then, as if such a memory from the recent past is too painful to bear, the poet consoles himself by slipping back through the years and revivifying once again in his brain the eternally youthful "ghost-girl-rider" of "The Phantom Horsewoman":

> You were she who abode
> By those red-veined rocks far West,
> You were the swan-necked one who rode
> Along the beetling Beeny Crest,
> And, reining nigh me,

Would muse and eye me,
While life unrolled us its very best.

Grief bears too heavily upon him, however, for the fragile vision to last, and his mood plummets again as he ponders on the cause of their latter-day estrangement. He wonders why it never occurred to them to revisit together the scenes of their happiest days, to "strive to seek / That time's renewal" before it was too late. This remorse for things left undone is followed by the poet's dispirited acceptance of the futility of trying to change the past, and, finally, his abject surrender to overpowering nature of his grief:

Well, well! All's past amend,
Unchangeable. It must go.
I seem but a dead man held on end
To sink down soon. . . . O you could not know
That such swift fleeing
No soul foreseeing -
Not even I - would undo me so!

"The Going," written only a few weeks after Emma's death, compresses a wide range of emotional reactions into a single poem. It contains, moreover, the seeds of many ideas which will burgeon out into other poems as, little by little, the poet works his way through his grief.[2] The first ten lines, for example, are developed further in "Without Ceremony" (CP, 282), in which Hardy once more chides his wife for her sudden, unannounced departure. He considers it just the ultimate indulgence of her lifelong habit of careering off "anywhere - say to town - " without so much as saying good-bye when the impulse takes her. However this time her departure is for good. W. David Shaw points out that "[t]he apparent major meaning" of the poem, "a breach of decorum, is really the minor meaning. The true major

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[2] Several critics have made this observation, most notably Dennis Taylor (Hardy's Poetry, 29); however the focus of his comments is somewhat different from mine.

meaning is repressed because it is too painful to face" (48).

Line twelve of "The Going", containing only the two words "unmoved" and "unknowing," is expanded out, in a similar way, into the thirty lines of "Your Last Drive" (CP, 278), which describes Emma, returning from an outing, and passing "with a heedless eye" by the spot where eight day later she would be buried. Hardy's own absence of any premonition of her death emerges in stanza three:

> I drove not with you. . . . Yet had I sat
> At your side that eve I should not have seen
> That the countenance I was glancing at
> Had a last-time look in the flickering sheen,
> Nor have read the writing upon your face,
> 'I go hence soon to my resting place.'

Similarly, stanza three of "The Going," in which Emma's presence momentarily seems real, only to be swiftly snatched away, unfolds into the plaintive monotones of "The Walk" (CP, 279):

> You did not walk with me
> Of late to the hill-top tree
> By the gated ways,
> As in earlier days;
> You were weak and lame,
> So you never came,
> And I went alone, and I did not mind,
> Not thinking of you as left behind..
>
> I walked up there today
> Just in the former way;
> Surveyed around
> The familiar ground
> By myself again:
> What difference, then?
> Only that underlying sense
> Of the look of a room on returning thence.

In these final lines the awful "yawning blankness" of the earlier poem is muted to a subtler but equally compelling sense of total emptiness.

Next, the swift transcendence of memory in stanza four of "The Going" which temporarily negates this overwhelming sense of loss by restoring Emma once more to the youthful ghost-rider of "The Phantom Horsewoman," is repeated again in the deeply romantic "Beeny Cliff" (CP, 291). Its first line, incidentally, is a delightful concession to opulence from one who boasts of avoiding as the plague the "jewelled line" (Selected Letters, 321):

> O the opal and the sapphire of that wandering western
> sea,
> And the woman riding high above with her bright hair
> flapping free -
> The woman whom I loved so, and who loyally loved me.

Finally, the poet's candid acknowledgment of the breakdown of his marriage, "Why then latterly did we not speak . . . ?" in stanza five, and his acquiescence to the fact that past events are immutable, in stanza six, reappear in the lines Hardy addresses to his dead wife in "After a Journey" (CP, 289):

> What have you found to say of our past -
> Scanned across the dark space wherein I have
> lacked you?
> Summer gave us sweets, But autumn wrought division?
> Things were not lastly as firstly well
> With us twain, you tell?
> But all's closed now, despite Time's derision.

Throughout these poems Hardy's power to restore Emma to life in his memory surges and recedes according to his mood. At his most skeptical moments, In "A Dream or No" (CP, 288) for example, he calls into question the reliability of his memory when it comes to the whole romantic experience of his youth. "Why go to Juliot?" he asks, "What's Juliot to me?" Did that fateful meeting with Emma ever really occur, or was it merely a dream?

> Does there even a place like Saint-Juliot exist?
> Or a Vallency Valley
> With stream and leafed alley,

Or Beeny, or Bos with its flounce flinging mist?

Furthermore, if Hardy had merely preserved Emma in his memory, her afterlife would have terminated with his death. Instead he wrote this remarkable sequence of elegiac love poems, immortalizing her in a way granted to few, if any other, women.

This raises the question of the place of these poems in the elegiac tradition. Many critics have commented on this subject, and while most generally agree that the sequence has many links with the established form of the elegy, it breaks away from the tradition in two distinct ways. For one thing, as Trevor Johnson observes, "these are the first major elegies written out of total disbelief" ("Despite Time's Derision," 9). Denied Christianity's consoling promise of eternal life after death Hardy must find solace on human terms. In doing so, according to Peter Sacks, he "appears to move beyond any of the inherited ideologies or poetic forms that previously had supported an elegist's pursuit" (234). Secondly, as Jean Brooks notes, while the traditional elegist spoke formally and publicly, making the death of his subject

> the occasion for a general meditation on Man's relationship to Death . . . Hardy's elegy speaks in the intimate personal rhythms of twentieth century [sic] conversation of a private relationship between husband and wife (81-82). . . . Never before had the elegy sounded such a note of purely personal grief. (85)

Rod Edmond goes even further, to propose that Hardy and some of his contemporary poets created a whole "new subgenre of poetry, the domestic elegy, which arose in the Victorian period and which was the product of the modification and reworking of existing poetic forms by changing social and cultural norms" (165).

Perhaps the most graphic example of Hardy's divergence from the traditional pastoral elegy, which typically depicts

Nature mourning along with the poet for the one eulogized, is "A Death-Day Recalled" (CP, 290). It reveals how certain features of the natural world remains totally indifferent to the death of one who had loved them in life:

> Beeny did not quiver,
> Juliot grew not gray,
> Thin Vallency's river
> Held its wonted way.
> Bos seemed not to utter
> Dimmest note of dirge,
> Targan mouth a mutter
> To its creamy surge.

Although Emma had loved these remote beauty spots and had pined for them when confined in an urban setting, they remained quite unmoved by the passing of "their former friend."

While it is true that Hardy brought the elegy into the twentieth century by stripping it of its artificial forms of consolation, and by speaking it in an intensely personal voice anteceded only by Tennyson in In Memoriam, he did not alter the overarching purpose behind the elegiac tradition. That is to defy fugitive Time by preserving the person elegized in the most perdurable manner given to mankind--in art. Emma Hardy will live on as long as the "Poems of 1912-13," and the many other poems inspired by her, continue to be read and appreciated. Hardy can justly say with Shakespeare:

> Yet do thy worst, old Time; despite thy wrong,
> My love shall in my verse ever live young
> (Sonnet 19).

Hardy did not fail, either, to give Emma the kind of continuance afforded by the memorial artifact. He designed her gravestone in Stinsford churchyard, and because she was buried so far from her beloved Cornwall, he felt it incumbent upon him to have a memorial stone erected, to his own design, in the church at St. Juliot where she had once played the

organ, and the restoration of which had been the cause of their first meeting. In September of 1916 Hardy and his second wife, Florence, traveled to St. Juliot to see if the work had been properly carried out (Pinion, 188). From that experience came the poem "The Marble Tablet" (CP, 617). Its first stanza tackles the problem of trying to capture the essence of the real woman in a cold, lifeless artifact:

> There it stands, though alas, what a little of her
> Shows in its cold white look!
> Not her glance, glide, or smile; not a tittle of
> her
> Voice like the purl of a brook;
> Not her thoughts, that you read like a book.

Because the epitaph on a tablet such as this must be compressed into a limited space it must necessarily be confined to the most general of facts stated in stiffly formal language:

> The still marble tablet, date-graven,
> Gives all that it can, tersely lined.

Yet although a memorial of this kind may be a less than perfect way of expressing Emma's real warmth and human spirit, its very durability flings a taunt at Time. And Hardy was not willing to deny Emma any kind of afterlife which he was capable of granting her.

One kind of perpetuation may at first seem somewhat difficult to ascribe to her however. That is the kind achieved by making some significant contribution to society. It is true that Emma did have literary aspirations of her own, but lacked the talent to fulfill them. Many of her writing efforts, particularly those of her later years, were the product of her obsession with religion, and her deteriorating mental condition (Biography, 478-9). Had she been married to anyone less famous than Thomas Hardy it is improbable that anything she wrote would have survived her.

One segment of her writing, however, was to immortalize her in an oblique and unexpected way. This was her charming, ingenuous account of her memories of childhood, and of her first meeting with her future husband, called Some Recollections. When Hardy found and read its contents shortly after her death he was deeply moved. He quotes from it at length in the Life, and many echoes of its words can be found in some of his finest poetic tributes to his late wife. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings, who jointly edited Some Recollections for publication in 1961, have cited a number of poems which can be directly linked to passages in Emma's memoir. The two following entries, for example, obviously influenced such poems as "Beeny Cliff," "The Phantom Horsewoman," and "After a Journey":

> An unforgettable experience to me, scampering up and down the hills on my beloved mare alone, wanting no protection, the rain going down my back often and my hair floating in the wind (63).
>
> I rode my pretty mare Fanny and he walked by my side and I showed him some [more] of the neighbourhood--the cliffs, along the roads, and through the scattered hamlets, sometimes gazing down at the solemn small shores [below] where the seals lived, coming out of great caverns very occasionally (69-71).

The poem "Places" (CP, 293) clearly owes a great deal to "Some recollections." Although Hardy did visit Emma's birthplace in Plymouth on his way home from Cornwall after her death, there are certain details in the first two stanzas which could only have been learned from that source:

> Nobody says: Ah, that is the place
> Where chanced, in the hollow of years ago,
> What none of the Three Towns cared to know -
> The birth of a little girl of grace -
> The sweetest the house saw, first or last;
> Yet it was so
> On that day long past.
>
> Nobody thinks: There, there she lay
> In a room by the Hoe, like the bud of a flower,

And listened just after the bedtime hour,
To the stammering chimes that used to play
The quaint Old Hundred-and-Thirteenth tune
In Saint Andrew's tower
Night, morn, and noon.

Emma had written of St. Andrews and its "chimes which played every four hours that fine old tune [the Old 113th]" adding "I have good reason to remember it--as we lived for five years not far away, and that tune with its haltings and runs plays up in my head often even now" (12). Stanza three of "Places" moves forward in time from Emma's babyhood to depict her once again as the "ghost-girl-rider" of the Hardy's courtship days in Cornwall:

Nobody calls to mind that here
Upon Boterel Hill, where the waggoners skid,
With cheeks whose airy flush outbid
Fresh fruit in bloom, and free of fear,
She cantered down, as if she must fall
(Though she never did),
To the charm of all.

The final stanza moves even further forward, into the present, to show the poet's lack of zest for living now that the one who brought the past so radiantly to life has gone:

Nay: one there is to whom these things,
That nobody else's mind calls back,
Have a savour that scenes in being lack,
And a presence more than the actual brings;
To whom to-day is beneaped and stale,
And its urgent clack
But a vapid tale.

Because Emma's memoir is the source of much of the imagery in this and other poems, it can be asserted that she has been immortalized through a work of her own. Even though this occurs indirectly--it is Hardy's poems after all which have kept her memory before the public--it does not really detract from her own contribution to the poetic process. Moreover, Hardy has actually magnified her memories into something far more significant here by weaving in a subtext

on the limitations of keeping the dead alive in memory. This is another of those poems in which he depicts himself as the sole survivor of an experience. He underscores the fact that he is the only one keeping Emma alive in memory by repeating that nobody else is doing so in the phrases: "Nobody says," "Nobody thinks," "Nobody calls to mind," and "nobody else's mind calls back." To Hardy alone these scenes from the past are so real that the present is flat, stale, and illusory alongside of them. Yet from our perspective these memories would have gone to the grave with him had he not set them down for posterity in poetry.

Perhaps Emma's failure to bear a child is at the root of Hardy's ambivalence about heredity as a means of self-perpetuation. As I have pointed cut in the previous chapter, poems on this subject often stress the negative, rather than the positive aspects of having children. We cannot select which genes our offspring will inherit, and our own genetic contribution will be diluted down through the generations. Keeping these factors in mind might partially compensate for the disappointment of remaining childless.

Emma is given every other form of continuance which Hardy can devise, however, and her memoir is the inspiration for yet another one of these, living on through metamorphosis into another life form. Recalling her early childhood she writes:

> I can well remember when I was three years old being taken a little way into the country to see daisies, as children are taken to see the sea; my surprise and joy were very great when I saw a whole field of them, I can never forget the ecstatic state it put me in (1).

Two months after her death Hardy memorialized her love of daisies in "Rain on a Grave" (CP 280). The first three stanzas are somewhat reminiscent of the scene in Far From the Madding Crowd in which the flowers planted on Fanny Robin's grave, in a sentimental gesture by her repentant lover

Sergeant Troy, are washed away by the rain (293-6). In this poem, in contrast, the rain, although unwelcome at first, will eventually nourish rather than destroy the daisies growing on Emma's grave. It is in the final stanza, after the rain has done its work, that the process of metamorphosis will begin:

> Soon will be growing
> Green blades from her mound,
> And daisies be showing
> Like stars on the ground,
> Till she form a part of them -
> Ay - the sweet heart of them,
> Loved beyond measure
> With a child's pleasure
> All her life round.

As her elements are absorbed into the world of growing things Emma will live once more, like little Fanny Hurd, in the "daisy shapes" waving above her grave.

While it is less explicit than "Rain on a Grave" another poem about Emma, "Lament" (CP, 283), also suggests that metamorphosis might be at work when it describes her as sleeping in her "yew-arched bed." One can easily imagine her becoming "[p]ortion of this yew" in time, like the friend of the speaker's grandsire in "Transformations."

Finally, Emma is given one more kind of afterlife in the poem "The Strange House" (CP, 537), which Hardy subtitled (Max Gate A.D. 2000). After living in this house for over twenty years she has imprinted her personality on its walls so permanently that the more perceptive of its future occupants can sense her presence there almost a century later. This poem, like "The House of Silence," takes the form of a dialogue between an individual who is sensitive to those traces from the past and one who is not.

In the first stanza the piano, which for so many years had felt the touch of Emma's fingers on its keys, still emits its ghostly music to the one with the psychic acuity to hear

it, even though the more obtuse speaker points out that it is no longer even there:

> 'I hear the piano playing -
> Just as a ghost might play.'
> ' - O, but what are you saying?
> There's no piano to-day;
> Their old one was sold and broken;
> Years past it went amiss.'
> ' - I heard it or shouldn't have spoken:
> A strange house, this!

The first speaker next becomes aware of the faint undertones of conversations from long ago, and half glimpses a fleeting figure lingering on the stair. Speaker two, meanwhile, attempts to find some rational explanation for these paranormal phenomena, but finally begins to wonder if the first speaker might not, after all, be receiving vibrations, unavailable to others, from past events imprinted on Max Gate's walls by Emma and her husband years ago:

> ' - Ah, maybe you've some vision
> Of showings beyond our sphere;
> Some sight, sense, intuition
> Of what once happened here?
> The house is old; they've hinted
> It once held two love-thralls,
> And they may have imprinted
> Their dreams on its walls?

As if this kind of supernatural imprinting is too hypothetical, however, Hardy closes "Poems of 1912-13" with "Where the Picnic Was" (CP, 297), in which he retraces a journey in search of some visible, external mark left on the environment which will bring back Emma's memory in a more immediate and tangible way. He finds it in the burnt circle of charred stick ends marking the spot where the Hardys and two visiting friends had built a picnic fire the previous summer. Once again he sees himself as the last remaining member of a group, the "[l]ast relic of the band / Who came that day." The two friends have simply returned to the city. But his well-beloved "has shut her eyes / For evermore."

There is a quiet sense of resolution in this, the concluding line of an elegiac sequence unique in English poetry. Hardy has now completed the work of drawing all his poetic afterlives together to immortalize Emma in all the multiple ways his imagination can devise. But he is fully aware that even the most enduring of them can merely defer the inevitable for a finite space of time. Now, at last, he can lay the ghosts of memory by gently shutting the eyes of the dead for evermore.

EPILOGUE

While it is true that the importance of the theme of death in Hardy's poetry has long been recognized by most critics, the afterlife, which I consider equally significant, continues to be neglected. Even those reviewers who pay it glancing attention fail to see that it manifests itself in a multitude of forms. Jean Brooks, to name just one, states categorically that "[p]osthumous existence in the memory of the living is the only kind of immortality Hardy can recognize" (104; emphasis added).

Another critic, Donald Davie, would take exception to my belief that Hardy's afterlives are always finite. He argues against J. Hillis Miller's explication of "At Castle Boterel," in which he states that "Emma exists not as an objective ghost which any man might see, but in the poet's mind" solely, and will vanish when he is gone (Distance and Desire, 251). Davie retorts, "I repudiate such a reading totally, and with a sort of fury." He is convinced instead that, "because a man's mind survives the death of his body," that moment of intense "quality" experienced by Hardy and Emma as they climbed Boterel Hill will persist forever, "indestructible in a metaphysical reality," after the last one who remembers it has ceased to exist ("Hardy's Virgilian Purples," 154-5). However if there were any real doubts that immortality of this kind is anything more than an imaginative exploration pursued by Hardy for poetic purposes, "A Sign-Seeker" (CP, 30), ought to dispel them. In this poem, after describing a list of strange occurrences which he has witnessed in nature over the years, the poet expresses his regret that the one phenomenon of which he most longs to be convinced--that life is possible after death--remains totally unproven to him:

> In graveyard green, where his pale dust lies pent
> To glimpse a phantom parent, friend,
> Wearing his smile, and 'Not the end!'

Outbreathing softly: that were blest enlightenment.

After asserting that the scantest material sign from the supernatural world would be proof enough to convince him of the reality of a metaphysical posthumous existence, he concludes that this kind of hope, so real to others, will always be denied to him:

- There are who, rapt to heights of trancelike
trust,
These tokens claim to feel and see,
Read radiant hints of times to be -
Of heart to heart returning after dust to dust.

Such scope is granted not to lives like mine . . .
I have lain in dead men's beds, have walked
The tombs of those with whom I had talked,
Called many a gone and goodly one to shape a
sign,

And panted for response. But none replies;
No warnings loom, nor whisperings
To open out my limitings,
And Nescience mutely muses: When a man falls he
lies.

It is evident here, as in so many poems, that Hardy yearns to believe in life after death, and that his loss of faith in its possibility pains him. His invention of an array of colorful finite afterlives is no more than a subjective human attempt to fill the gap.

Considering his elaborate efforts to immortalize his first wife in so many of these poetic ways it is surprising that he has so little ambition concerning his own continuance in the memories of the living. In my discussion of the poem "Afterwards" in an earlier chapter I noted that Hardy does not ask to be remembered as the great man of letters he actually was to become, but rather as a lover of the world's natural beauties, and as a protector of its innocent creatures. "A Poet" (CP, 336), written late in his life, reveals, once again, the unassuming nature of his expectations. In this case he wishes to be remembered simply

for the fact that two exceptional women gave him their love and loyalty:

> Attentive eyes, fantastic heed,
> Assessing minds, he does not need,
> Nor urgent writs to sup or dine,
> Nor pledges in the rosy wine.
>
> For loud acclaim he does not care
> By the august or rich or fair,
> Nor for smart pilgrims from afar,
> Curious on where his hauntings are.
>
> But soon or later, when you hear
> That he has doffed this wrinkled gear,
> Some evening, at the first star-ray,
> Come to his graveside, pause and say:
>
> 'Whatever his message - glad or grim -
> Two bright-souled women clave to him;'
> Stand and say that while day decays;
> It will be word enough of praise.

Equally lacking in hubris is Hardy's remark to his wife Florence, that "[h]is only ambition, so far as he could remember was to have some poem or poems in a good anthology like the Golden Treasury" (L&W, 478). Given his remarkable achievement as a poet this desire seems modest indeed.

But Hardy was a complex individual, and he was not above manipulating the facts of his life to represent himself as he wished to be remembered. Some may find it hard to reconcile the fact that the poet of scrupulous honesty who said, "if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst," could also be the perpetrator of one of the "most elaborate--and most notorious . . . attempts to anticipate and even outwit the intrusive inquisitiveness of future generations" (Millgate, Testamentary Acts, 122). This was his scheme to allow his wife Florence to appear as the sole author of his official biography, actually written almost entirely by himself. Paradoxically, in that very work, he declares "his absolute refusal at all times to write his reminiscences" (L&W, 346). However, the discrepancy between Hardy's public, philosophical stance, and his personal need

for privacy as an ordinary human being, is just one more example of his double vision. And if the coexistence of these two polaries in his psyche is the source of his genius, it is probably unwise to be overly judgmental. Indeed Hardy was an intensely private man, and the appearance of an unauthorized biography by Ernest Brennecke Jr. in 1925 infuriated Hardy, who so resented its "quizzing impertinence" that it alarmed him into hastening the completion of his own account of his life (Testamentary Acts, 12). In it he reveals all he wishes the world to know and nothing more.

Looking back at it from this distance the deception seems relatively harmless, even though its motivation may have been questionable. Whether or not we can agree about the relevance of probing into every intimate detail of a writer's personal life, one thing is certain. It is Hardy's extraordinary body of work accomplished over his long lifetime that really matters. And until his insights cease to enlighten, and his words fail to delight, he will live on in those writings for countless generations to come.

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