HARDY’S VIEWS IN TESS OF THE D’URBERVILLES

BY LUCILLE HERBERT

Views of landscape and views of life were staple materials of fiction in the nineteenth century; and probably no Victorian novel so abounds in both kinds of “view” as Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles. Hardy himself seems to have been well aware of this quality of his work. In the Preface to the fifth edition of Tess, and generally in his reflections on the art of fiction, he tends to dwell on what he calls the “scenic” and “contemplative parts” of his novels.\(^1\) What he aims at, he writes, is “to give expression to the views of life prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century” (xviii), to convey his own “idiosyncratic mode of regard,” and to “intensify the expression of things . . . so that the heart and inner meaning is made vividly visible.”\(^2\) Hardy’s own practice, then, would seem sufficiently to account for the pervasiveness in twentieth-century discussions of Hardy of optical words and optical metaphors for consciousness and belief.

In such discussions, however, most critics have tended to praise Hardy for his “vision” while deprecating his “views.”\(^3\) Virginia Woolf showed how this could be done in her essay on Hardy in The Second Common Reader when she borrowed Hardy’s own phrase, “moments of vision,” to distinguish what she liked in his novels from “the long stretches of plain daylight” she found tedious.\(^4\) Her use of the phrase inevitably suggested the possi-

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\(^1\) P. xviii. All page references to Hardy’s novels and prefaces are to the Wessex Edition (London, 1912), and will henceforth be given parenthetically in the text.


\(^3\) The most cogent and original treatment of Hardy as a “visionary” rather than a philosophical novelist is Albert J. Guerard’s Thomas Hardy (Cambridge, Mass., 1949). Some recent discussions of Hardy that show informed respect for his social and ethical ideas are A. O. J. Cockshut’s analysis of Jude the Obscure in The Unbelievers (London, 1966), pp. 162-66, and David J. De Laura, “‘The Ache of Modernism’ in Hardy’s Later Novels,” ELH, XXXIV (1967), 380-99.

\(^4\) The Second Common Reader (New York, 1932), p. 266.

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bility of reevaluating the "Victorian" Hardy as a precursor of the lyric and symbolic novelists of the early modern period. What has made the word "vision" even more attractive, of course, is the example of Henry James. There might, after all, be common ground for Hardy and James on that plot of soil, the artist's sensibility, whose "quality and capacity," according to James, can be measured by "its ability to 'grow' with due freshness and straightness any vision of life." Hardy could very plausibly be represented as standing beside James as "a watcher at the window . . . a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field glass."  

It seems to me that just because of its association with Virginia Woolf's fiction or Henry James's, the word "vision" is misleading when it is applied to Hardy. First of all, it deflects attention from the question of the connection in Hardy's novels between the visualizing and philosophizing—or between spectacle and thought. Second, it has too often suggested that the elaborate plots of Hardy's novels are an embarrassment, to be ignored as mere vestiges of a kind of taste now happily extinct. Third, it encourages the application of distracting standards of judgment. For example, in his essay on Tess in The Language of Fiction, David Lodge observes that we "value" Hardy for "the breadth, variety, and unexpectedness of his vision," and for the "interest" of the "constantly shifting perspectives" of his novels. Yet he insists that Hardy's novels fail, essentially, because of "confusion in the handling of point of view," so that at any given moment the reader is unable to identify "the consciousness of a character or narrator" through which scenes are to be mediated.  

Lodge's Jamesian assumption that "point of view" must be established through an identifiable consciousness seems to keep him from following out the question his essay as a whole leads us to ask. Why should Hardy have made so regular a practice of mixing the consciousness of the narrator with that of a character, abstract words with concrete images, highly-colored pictures of Wessex scenery with bleak and sometimes contradictory reflections on the laws of nature, society, and the universe? I should like to try to answer that question along with another

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one, from which I believe it ought not to be separated. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is a composition of incidents as much as it is a composition of descriptive and meditative passages. How are Hardy's "views" in *Tess* reflected in his management of the plot—his use of violent crises and improbable coincidences? My aim in raising these questions is not, however, to produce yet another new reading of *Tess* or even a "correct" approach to Hardy. I am interested, rather, in attempting to get at some implications of the preoccupation with ways of seeing in late nineteenth-century fiction that are not directly related to the Jamesian idea of the novel as the painting of minds and the representation of interior actions. The most likely literary progenitors of Hardy's views, I shall try to show, are those poets of the eighteenth century, particularly Gray and Goldsmith and Cowper, whose depressed meditations on picturesque landscapes have a temperamental affinity with Hardy's and also convey a response to the agrarian and speculative revolutions that were to reach Wessex a century later. In the nineteenth century, the moralized landscapes of these poets seem to have become part of the language in the form of topographical metaphors that imply attitudes to social and intellectual history.

My starting point is not Hardy or the eighteenth-century poets, but a novel by Hardy's elder contemporary, George Meredith; and from Meredith my direction will be backward in time. In the Prelude to *The Egoist*, Meredith represents the main choice facing the novelist as the optical one of perspective and focus: whether to read "the Book of our common wisdom" (that is, human history) "by the watchmaker's eye in luminous rings eruptive of the infinitesimal, or pointed with examples and types under the broad Alpine survey of the spirit born of our united social intelligence." At this moment, Meredith is of course asserting his preference for the comic novel of ideas over the realistic novel as a means of interpreting history. But as the novel develops and Meredith elaborates the implications of his preference for "the broad Alpine survey," we come to see that it stands for a cluster of attitudes, the civilizing ideals of the Comic Spirit. These include a rational view of the relations between the sexes and the classes, knowledgeable interest in foreign

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7 *The Egoist*, I, 8. Page references are to the Memorial Edition (London, 1910), and will henceforth be given parenthetically in the text.
and classical civilizations, a disposition to look at social and political questions from the point of view of the future, and a general capacity for rational behavior based on disinterested self-knowledge. The ideals of the Comic Spirit can, I think, be subsumed in the phrase "philosophic cosmopolitanism." For my use of this term, which will be an important one in my discussion of Hardy, I am indebted to Alan D. McKillop's essay, "Local Attachment and Cosmopolitanism—The Eighteenth-Century Pattern."  

In The Egoist, the narrator is a spokesman for the Comic Spirit, born of our still-to-be-united social intelligence, who addresses the reader in the language, never yet spoken, of some possible society of enlightened men and women who are all incredibly agile walkers and talkers. His privileged characters, those who fall just short of the ideal of enlightenment, are Vernon Whitford, a philosophic young man of letters and of the future, who feels most at home in America and the Alps, and Clara Middleton, daughter of a wandering scholar. The main victim of the Comic Spirit and subject of the Alpine survey is Sir Willoughby Patterne, who has retired to his estate at Patterne Hall, with some sentimental pretense of local attachment to his native place, because he has learned that he cannot cut a large figure outside the boundaries of his narrow world. Willoughby's egoism makes him an "example and type" for the interpretation of history in two ways: he is the insufficiently evolved male animal, metaphorically the inhabitant of low-lying swamps and primeval forests (I, 132), and yet "a gentleman of our time and country, of wealth and station" (I, 5). When Clara, who is engaged to Willoughby, decides to fight for freedom from "being dragged around the walls" of his egoism (I, 116), she retreats for a time "within her horizon of self, now her utter boundary" (I, 125), but she keeps "a prospect of freedom" in view by the spiritual exercise of "imagin[ing] an Alp" (I, 243). In the end, Clara and Vernon plan to meet and marry in the Alps, while Willoughby is left to marry the faded and disaffected Laetitia Dale, whose name completes the topographical allegory.

Meredith's scheme of linked metaphors makes a connection between views of landscape and views of life that we will also find,

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in more complicated form, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. But before turning to Hardy, I should like to examine some antecedents to Meredith's topography of social attitudes. In the following passage from Hazlitt's essay on William Godwin in *The Spirit of the Age*, we find a similar though more casual association between rational, enlightened opinions and a broad continuous landscape, seen from above:

The author of *Political Justice* took abstract reason for the rule of conduct and abstract good for its end. He places the human mind on an elevation, from which it commands a view of the whole line of moral consequences; and requires it to conform its acts to the larger and more enlightened conscience which it has thus acquired. He absolves man from the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority, private and local attachment, in order that he may devote himself to the boundless pursuit of universal benevolence.9

Wordsworth's reflections on Godwin in Book XII of *The Prelude* make an interesting contrast with Hazlitt's, since Wordsworth writes of Godwin from an unsympathetic point of view, yet also uses a topographical metaphor to imply his objection to Godwinism. For Wordsworth, Godwin's doctrine of the perfectability of man seems to break the continuous landscape of human history, because Godwin assumes that man in the rational society of the future will be different from what he now is. In this passage, Wordsworth is of course looking back with dismay upon his youthful radicalism:

Dare I avow that wish was mine to see,
And hope that future times would surely see,
The man to come, parted, as by a gulph,
From him who had been; that I could no more
Trust the elevation which had made me one
With the great family that still survives
To illuminate the abyss of ages past,
Sage, warrior, patriot, hero... . . .

(XII. 57-64)

This is the crisis to which the whole poem has been moving, the phase immediately before the moment in his life the poet describes in the opening lines of Book I, his return to the "known Vale" (I. 72) and the "one cottage" (I. 74) where he would attempt to bind his broken days together again and reach back to the "hid-


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ing-places” (XII. 279) of his poetic power. In other words, his
discovery that the ideals of the Enlightenment were inimical to
his poetic gift led Wordsworth to a view of local attachment and
a use of the topographical metaphor precisely opposite to those of
Hazlitt and Meredith.

In all three writers, as later in Hardy, the landscape has a tem-
poral dimension, so that visual orientation in space implies mental
orientation in time, in social, intellectual, or personal history.10
This is also the case in Oliver Goldsmith’s poem, The Deserted
Village, in which a solitary exile returns to his native village to
find that the entire population has been dispossessed and forced
into exile by a grasping landlord, a follower in “trade’s unfeel-
ing train” (63), who has enclosed all the common land. The
blighted and desolate fields around the village reveal the changed
condition of the land “where wealth accumulates and men decay”
(52). In an earlier poem by Goldsmith, The Traveller, a moun-
tain top in the Alps is the setting for a meditation on local attach-
ment, given the subtitle “A Prospect of Society.” As he looks
down, the speaker is saddened by a feeling of homelessness and
longs to find “some spot to real happiness consigned” (10),

But where to find that happiest spot below,
Who can direct, when all pretend to know? (63-64)

Cosmopolitanism breeds cultural relativism. Kept in spiritual
exile by his superior knowledge, the traveller consoles himself by
reflecting on the arbitrary character of merely local beliefs.11

The questions underlying these treatments of the theme of local
attachment were to permeate much of the fiction and sociology of
the nineteenth century and after. Is it best for man to live within
local horizons, reliving the lives of his forebears by inheriting their
traditions and the soil in which they are rooted? Or can men
become free spirits, citizens of the world, taking long views from
Alpine heights, living the life of the mind in the light of reason
only? Is the man without local attachments at home wherever
he goes and therefore, like Meredith’s mountain climbing heroes

10 I am indebted here to Carol R. Anderson’s discussion of The Return of the
Native in “Time, Space, and Perspective in Thomas Hardy,” NCF, IX (1954),
192-208.
11 McKillop notes (p. 202) that Goldsmith’s “philosophic observer is both inside
and outside . . . local attachments.” This is also the point of view of the narrator
of Tess of the D’Urbervilles.

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and heroines, able to touch earth and be supported by it? Or is he a stranger who has, in the phrase of Conrad’s Marlow speaking of the cosmopolitan Kurtz, “kicked himself loose of the earth?”

Hardy was, of course, divided between enlightened cosmopolitanism and nostalgia for traditional values. He shared with Goldsmith and Wordsworth a fear of the moral and psychological consequences of discontinuity in man’s environment and beliefs. He also shared with Hazlitt and Meredith the belief that local attachment fosters illusion; and he was inclined to think that the newest views of life are likely to be the truest. In other words, his sociology was much more conservative than his philosophy. His views of social change in rural communities much more nearly resemble those of Burke than those of Herbert Spencer, whose disciple in other respects he sometimes professed himself to be.

In this ambivalence, Hardy was not unique. Increasingly toward the end of the nineteenth century, Robert A. Nisbet has shown in *The Sociological Tradition*, the heirs of the Enlightenment were driven to accept what had for a century been the conservative analysis of the consequences of the loss of local bonds and traditional authorities. “A degree of nostalgia,” Nisbet writes, “is built into the very structure of nineteenth century sociology.”

The distinction which the German sociologist, Max Weber, was to make between communal and associational societies (Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft) would probably have seemed both apt and familiar to Hardy. Communities are held together by non-rational bonds of the kind which the rationalist Hazlitt describes as “the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority.” Associative societies are formed by rationally calculated interest, often expressed in contracts. In the Preface to *Far From the Madding

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13 Hardy suggested to a correspondent in 1888 that he “might be helped to a provisional view of the universe by . . . the works of Herbert Spencer and other agnostics” (*Life*, p. 205). For Spencer “the industrial type of society . . . is the one which most subserves that happiness of the units which is to be achieved by social organization” (*Principles of Sociology* [New York, 1897], I, 600). For Hardy it is in the remote villages of agrarian Dorsetshire that “happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among them that perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed” (“The Dorsetshire Labourer” [1883], *Thomas Hardy’s Personal Writings*, ed. Harold Orel [Lawrence, Kansas, 1966], p. 169: hereafter cited as *Personal Writings*).


15 Ibid., p. 80. See also *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth

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Crowd, Hardy writes of the change in Wessex from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, of "the recent supplanting of the class of stationary cottagers . . . by a population of more or less migratory labourers." This change has been fatal "to the preservation of legend, folk-lore, close inter-social ties" for which "the indispensable conditions of existence are attachment to the soil of one particular spot by generation after generation" (ix).

To Weber and to the French sociologist, Emil Durkheim, as to Hardy, Goldsmith, and Wordsworth, associative societies are hostile to human need; without communal bonds man becomes vulnerable to the withering effects of anomie, alienation, which Durkheim found to be the main cause of suicide in modern cities. Hardy could not, of course, have known the work of either sociologist. But their main ideas had been current in England for over a century when Hardy wrote his last novels. In the following lines from Cowper's The Task (1785), for example, we find a clear expression of the organic relation between character and environment that underlies the alienating or withering effect of transplantation from what Weber would certainly have called a communal to an associative society. The context for the following lines is Cowper's justification of his decision to live in rural retirement, in "the low vale of life" (IV. 799):

Man in society is like a flower
Blown in its native bed: 'tis there alone
His faculties, expanded in full bloom,
Shine out; there only reach their proper use.
But man, associated and leagued with man
By regal warrant, or self-joined by bond
For interest sake, or swarming into clans
Beneath one head for purposes of war,
Like flowers selected from the rest, and bound
And bundled close to fill some crowded vase,
Fades rapidly, and, by compression marred,
Contracts defilement not to be endured.

(IV. 659-670)


10 Emil Durkheim, Suicide: A Study in Sociology, trans. J. A. Spaulding and George Simpson (New York, 1951). Durkheim's study, first published in 1897, calls to mind Hardy's characterization of Little Father Time in Jude the Obscure as "the expression in a single term" of, among other bleak properties of future humanity, "the coming universal wish not to live."
The relation between local attachment and cosmopolitan enlightenment is clearly an important issue in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in the views of the narrator and the circumstances and consciousness of the characters. It seems to me likely that Hardy's treatment of this theme descends at least in part from the descriptive-meditative poetry of the eighteenth century, a country of the mind in which Henry James would have been altogether ill at ease. Even Hardy's handling of point of view in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* can perhaps most readily be understood in relation to that tradition. It is very much like Gray's in the ode *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*. Like Gray's childhood self, and like his "little victims," Hardy's characters are ignorant of the grim future that awaits them. His narrator, like the speaker of Gray's poem, looks downward and backward from a remote and superior position. That, in a general way, is why the mixed perspective is an essential part of Hardy's narrative method in *Tess*: the reader is asked to see, with the author, from the point of view of the future and, with the character, in blissful or apprehensive ignorance—from inside and beyond the horizons of local time and place. What matters is not so much the identity of the perceiving consciousness as the perspective with regard to time.

One passage in *Tess* specifically recalls Gray's *Ode*. Tess, about to marry Angel Clare, is possessed by foreboding: her dark past may be awaiting her in the future. In order to prolong the happiness of the present moment, Tess consciously suppresses her sense of time, and her consciousness becomes double:

Her affection for [Angel Clare] was now the breath and life of Tess's being; it enveloped her as a photosphere, irradiated her into forgetfulness of her past sorrows, keeping back the gloomy spectres that would persist in their attempts to touch her—doubt, fear, moodiness, care, shame. She knew that they were waiting like wolves just outside the circumscribing light, but she had long spells of power to keep them in hungry subjection there. (249)

Tess is now like the mature spectator of Gray's poem, who is at once inside and outside the charmed circle within which the small Etonians play:

Alas, regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond today!
Yet see how all around ’em wait
The ministers of human fate,
And black Misfortune’s baleful train!
Ah, show them where in ambush stand
To seize their prey the murderous band!
Ah! tell them they are men!

These shall the fury Passions tear,
The vultures of the mind,
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame that skulks behind; . . .
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow’s piercing dart. (51-70)

Like Gray’s classical furies and vultures, Hardy’s spectres and wolves are predators and vengeful spirits of the mind: and the dark emotions they stand for are much the same. We notice that Hardy, like Gray, represents consciousness through personified abstractions, a procedure that would surely have been anathema to Henry James. Even here, when he comes very close to the mind of his character, he uses what he had called in an essay on “The Profitable Reading of Fiction” the “picturesque” as distinguished from the “subjective system . . . for the differentiation of character.” 17

The opening scenes of Tess of the D’Urbervilles establish a correspondence between views of landscape and views of life and between these and the fateful incidents of the plot. We first become aware of Tess in the historical perspective opened up by the local antiquary, Parson Tringham. She is the daughter of Jack Durbeyfield, degenerate heir to the ancient line of knightly D’Urbervilles. The scene itself is important from the retrospective point of view of the narrator, who knows it to be the first link in “black Misfortune’s baleful train.” We see Tess for the first time as the final object of a long visual perspective sketched in by the narrator. He begins by telling us that the Vale of Blackmoor is best seen from the surrounding hills, because a nearer

17 Personal Writings, p. 124. De Laura (ELH, XXXIV p. 396) finds something distinctively modern in the passage in Tess which is virtually a paraphrase of Gray’s poem of 1742: “The ‘gloomy spectres’ and ‘shapes of darkness’ which haunt Tess—"doubt, fear, moodiness, care, shame’ seem closer to the ‘fear and trembling’ of the modern existentialist imagination than to the sunlit ‘culture’ of high Victorian rationalism.” But they seem to me to be much closer to the pessimistic sadness of the eighteenth century poets of sensibility and the picturesque.
approach "is apt to engender dissatisfaction with its narrow, tortuous, and miry ways" (9). We note the extent to which the landscape is allegorized—or moralized. The view almost immediately takes on a historical dimension. The valley has become muddy and tortuous only since its ancient forests were cut down; and the traces of its former condition can be discerned only from a distance. Similarly, as we descend toward the village of Marlott and observe the May-Day procession of village maidens among whom Tess is to be discovered, we learn that the "real interest" (10) of the local celebration is not evident to the villagers, but only to the outside observer who is aware of its ancient origins in a pagan fertility cult. This is so because the celebration has deteriorated since happier days "before the habit of taking long views had reduced life to a monotonous average" (11).

In other words, the meaning of the procession, like the beauty of the once-wooded valley and the nobility of the rustic Durbeyfields, is hidden in the past, just as their destruction is hidden in the future. Only the "long view" of the outsider can reveal these values; yet, paradoxically, it is this very way of looking at things that has reduced life at Marlott to its present mean proportions and that threatens to destroy the vivid Tess. The historical "long view" of the antiquary and narrator is matched by the speculative far-sightedness of the modern-minded Angel Clare, who appears at the scene of the May-Day procession (in the company of his—literally—short-sighted brothers) to touch Tess with a momentary but prophetic unhappiness. Now, and again at the beginning of the Talbothays episode, Angel's neglect of Tess is explained by the quality of his vision: "He was ever in the habit of neglecting the particulars of an outward scene for the general impression" (154). Angel is the exemplar of what Hardy calls "the new views of life," and the point of view of the future is remote and abstract.

To Tess, at Talbothays, Angel seems at first to be regarding her from an "unmeasurable, Andean altitude" (161). Nevertheless, in a way, his final failure of vision is his inability to take a sufficiently elevated view of Tess's seduction by Alec D'Urberville. At last, too late, he confides his sorrows to the "large-minded stranger" he meets in Brazil. Once again, Hardy uses the topographical metaphor to represent the enlightened point of view:

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The stranger had sojourned in many more lands and among many more peoples than Angel; to his cosmopolitan mind such deviations from the social norm, so immense to domesticity, were no more than the irregularities of vale and mountain-chain to the whole terrestrial curve.  (434)

But the enlightened and free spirit is something less than a whole man. Had Angel been able to take a more personal and less abstract view of Tess after her confession, he would not have needed to become quite so comprehensively broad-minded in order to forgive her. He had been overwhelmed by his new idea of the treacherousness of appearances, and his ruling passion is what Hardy calls "the will to subdue . . . the substance to the conception."  (313). The final scene of the novel shows Angel Clare, appropriately, standing on a hilltop beside Tess's younger sister. They seem to have "shrunk to half their natural size" as they gaze across an "almost unlimited" prospect of "landscape beyond landscape" (507) at the black flag that announces the death of Tess.

In these passages and elsewhere, Hardy elaborates a kind of triple analogy between historical consciousness, distant prospects, and the point of view of the philosophic cosmopolitan. There is a corresponding analogy between close-up views, short-sightedness, and a position inside the boundaries of a particular social group. All local views except those of the traditional rural community are seen from the point of view of radical enlightenment, as "gross and narrow," to use Hazlitt's phrase once again. Rather diagrammatically, Hardy sketches in the middle class views of Angel Clare's conventional brothers:

When it was the custom to wear a double glass they wore a double glass; when it was the custom to wear spectacles they wore spectacles right away, all without reference to the particular variety of defect in their own vision. . . . Neither saw the difference between local truth and universal truth; that what the inner world said in their clerical and academic hearing was quite a different thing from what the outer world was thinking.  (204)

In the Talbothays episode, by contrast, Hardy represents with much sympathy the narrow views of another kind of local world: a traditional peasant community, unchanged since remote antiquity, where the very soil is "an essence of soils, pounded champagnes of the past" (248). At Talbothays, home of her mother's
unhistorical peasant ancestors, Tess seems, in Cowper's phrase, "like a flower / Blown in its native bed"; or, as Hardy puts it, "The sapling which had rooted down to a poisonous stratum on the spot of its sowing had been transplanted to a deeper soil" (165). As Tess descends into the Var Valley, Hardy recalls his description of the approach to Marlott: "The secret of Blackmoor was best discovered from the heights around; to read aright the valley before her, it was necessary to descend into its midst" (135). Here Angel Clare discovers the pleasures of local attachment, of "viewing life . . . from its inner side" (216). Because he now sees country people as individual persons, he finds that "variety had taken the place of monotonousness" (152), he becomes "wonderfully free from the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with a decline of belief in a beneficent Power" (152-153), and he singles out Tess as the prettiest and most interesting of the dairymaids.

But his view of things, however immediate, can never be wholly personal and local; his experience is too inclusive. When Dairyman Crick tells the story, to him a singular one, of William Dewy and the kneeling oxen, Angel sees it as typical: "It carries us back to mediaeval times, when faith was a living thing!" (143). When he looks at Tess from close up through the misty, irradiated atmosphere of the cow pastures, what he sees is the ideal type of her femininity: she is a "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature" (155); she seems to have the "dignified largeness" of a goddess or of Eve before the fall, to be "a visionary essence of woman—a whole sex condensed into one typical form" (167). Thus the outsider learning to "view life from its inner side" develops the feeling that experience resolves itself into archetypes, that the forms of things are perpetually renewed. The sense of time as eternally recurrent is the only one that Tess herself can conceive when she thinks about the past; but it saddens her to think about it at all. She refuses to allow Angel to give her lessons in history: "'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'" (162). Thus Angel's view of life at Talbothays, his perception of the mythical and recurrent patterns of experience, is a short view but not a local one: an abstraction of the peasant view of time.

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What Hardy does in the descriptive parts of the novel, then, is to exhibit his heroine within the shifting boundaries of a realistic landscape whose contours are moralized by the narrator's preoccupation with attitudes to life and his use of topographical and optical metaphors. What of the meditative parts, in which the narrator directly presents his own view of life? The character of the narrator, it seems to me, is a brilliant invention to maintain the complex perspectives of the novel. On the one hand, his position is elevated and remote; he takes the point of view of the future and of the historian, bleakly reductive. On the other hand, he is the friend and advocate of the heroine, for, as she laments, she has no other; therefore his retrospective sense of each moment of her career vivifies and magnifies its significance. According to the neatly ambiguous subtitle of the novel, the story is to be "faithfully presented by Thomas Hardy." But faithfulness in an advocate has a different meaning from faithfulness in a historian. Whether Tess suffers or inflicts suffering, the narrator blames the laws of nature and the institutions of man, however inconsistently or inappropriately. By their passionate inconsistency, his "views" become personal and vivid; they are the advocate's defense of a beloved woman who is condemned to death, and they magnify her image. His relation to her is the intimate one suggested by the epigraph to the novel: "Poor wounded name / My bosom as a bed shall lodge thee. . . ."

The plot of the novel, too, can be seen from several points of view at the same time; and these correspond rather closely to the enlarging and reducing perspectives established in the descriptions and meditations: the long view of the historian and philosophical spectator; the short view of the spectator who observes from inside the local horizon of the traditional community; and the direct and wholly local experience of the participant. Various critics have singled out one or the other as constituting the authentic—usually because it is thought to be the unconscious—vision of Thomas Hardy.

Dorothy Van Ghent's essay on Tess is a good and well-known example of one kind of reading.18 She admires most those passages in which Tess is seen by Angel Clare or the narrator as an archetypal figure, and believes that the essential form of the whole

work is that of a myth. With only a slight change of emphasis, Mrs. Van Ghent’s reading can be made to show specifically that the incidents of the plot are so arranged as to deny the reality of time and change. Beneath the particulars of his story, Hardy reveals the eternally recurring situations of myth and folktale: the scriptural story of the loss of Eden, the folk ballad of the maid who goes into the greenwood, the Greek myth of the fall of the house of Atreus. At the same time, she shows that even Tess’s personal history is arrested in time, since the same things happen to her again and again. In virtually every episode, culminating in the scene at Stonehenge, Tess falls asleep or into a trancelike state, and wakes up to violence. Over and over again, too, she symbolically anticipates her fate as adulteress or murderer or sacrificial victim—when she is covered in the blood of the horse, Prince, or when she eats Alec’s strawberries “in a half-pleased, half-reluctant state” (47), or when she strikes Alec with her work glove and draws blood, and so on until the murder scene. When Tess comes “home,” as she says, to Stonehenge, we understand that her fate is to return to her beginnings, that time is cyclical.

But if the incidents of Tess can be reduced to recurrent patterns, so can they be understood, as, for example, Arnold Kettle does in his so-called “Marxian interpretation,” as the exemplification of an on-going process which was irreversibly transforming the face of the world.¹⁹ Not Marx, perhaps, but the sociologist Durkheim ought to supply the terms for a description of the novel as history; since Hardy is perhaps less concerned with changes in the means of production than with changes in views of life. It was Durkheim’s theory that such mental constructs as time, space, and causality reflect the forms of communal or social experience rather than the inborn structure of the mind or the impress of individual experience.²⁰

Such an interpretation of Hardy’s novel would envisage the fate of Tess as the consequence of socially-conditioned views of life, including her own, which destroy her even while they help to create or reveal her human dignity and worth. Tess carries


within herself the contradictions of the community she was born in, whose traditional culture has been eroded by changes in economic and social relationships, education, the forms of religious life, consciousness of the past and of alien cultures, and so on. She has assimilated the values and habits of feeling of the peasant community, and in her inexperience and lack of egoistic drive, she is dependent upon its traditional wisdom. But the old lore reaches her through the impure channel of Joan Durbeyfield and her “Compleat Fortune-Teller,” and the knowledge and morality of schoolmistress and clergyman have rival authority over her sensitive mind and conscience. In other words, she is divided between two narrow and local views of life—those of the peasant community, and those of middle class society. Hence, at a crisis, Tess yields to every kind of compulsion from within and without. Because her person reveals none of her inner contradictions, but is only enhanced by them, she seems to outsiders to typify rural simplicity and beauty; and as a result she is peculiarly attractive and peculiarly obnoxious to those who are conscious of their own alienation or hardness. Thus she is subjected to physical violence by Alec D’Urberville, the migrant farm girls, and the stonily capitalistic Farmer Groby of Flintcombe-Ash, and to mental violence by Angel Clare, whose exterior conceals “a hard logical deposit, like a vein of metal in a soft loam” (308).

This view of the novel is essentially historical—that is, it assumes that for Hardy time is irreversible and is the main dimension of experience. This “long view” is hard to reconcile with the view that everything that happens has happened before, that time is recurrent or even illusory. There is yet a third way to look at Tess. In this version, the plot of the novel is essentially what it seems to be—a chain of accidental encounters, singular coincidences, and badly-timed communications. Time is essentially irrational, since the connections among events are neither necessary nor probable. The episodes of the coincidental plot are not typical but exceptional, rather like those gruesome local incidents that Hardy liked to read about in the Dorchester newspapers, or like the depressing popular ballads about real murders and hangings that Donald Davidson, who liked Hardy’s novels,

21 “The Traditional Basis of Thomas Hardy’s Fiction,” Still Rebels, Still Yankees, and Other Essays (Baton Rouge, 1957), p. 59: Hardy “wrote as a ballad maker would write if a ballad maker were to have to write novels.”

Hardy’s Views in “Tess of the D’Urbervilles”
and Andrew Lang, who notoriously did not,\textsuperscript{22} saw as the main models behind Hardy’s storytelling. As Hardy remarks in the Preface to 	extit{Wessex Tales}, “In the neighbourhood of county towns, hanging matters used to form a large proportion of the local tradition” (vii). Tess is the local heroine with a gallows in her future.

But the hanging of Tess is a matter of more than local interest. A novel, Hardy wrote, is not “the thing” but “a view of the thing.”\textsuperscript{23} From the point of view of the historical consciousness, local events, odd and fortuitous, become necessary and regular, part of an irreversible process or a recurrent pattern. And our final view in 	extit{Tess} is the “almost unlimited prospect” from the summit of the Great West Hill. From this exalted position, the hanging of Tess implicates the President of the Immortals on the heights of Olympus and the D’Urberville knights and dames sleeping in their tombs.

What Hardy sought to achieve through the “picturesque” method of 	extit{Tess of the D’Urbervilles} was, very probably, a characteristically bizarre and modern effect that would convey “the views of life prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century” and his own “idiosyncratic mode of regard.” A few years before, he had written in a notebook: “I don’t want to see landscapes, \textit{i.e.}, scenic paintings of them, because I don’t want to see the original realities—as optical effects, that is. I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings. The ‘simply natural’ is interesting no longer.”\textsuperscript{24} But the projection of “abstract imaginings” onto natural landscapes is a venerable tradition that reaches back to medieval allegory. In the \textit{paysage moralisé} which Hardy seems to have inherited from the eighteenth century we have a dis-integrated kind of allegory which seems to me very much in keeping with Hardy’s conception of Victorian Wessex as a frayed and deteriorated remnant of a medieval kingdom.

It should be clear that Hardy does not advocate a restoration of the ancient kingdom. He does not, for example, adopt the reactionary-agrarian attitude that Allen Tate expressed in his essay on “Religion and the Old South,” in which he proposed a return, by violence if necessary, to a closed and traditional society, and

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{The New Review} (February, 1895), pp. 247-49.
\textsuperscript{23} “The Profitable Reading of Fiction,” \textit{Personal Writings}, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Life}, p. 185.
explicitly attacked the "Long View" of social history as "the Cosmopolitan destroyer of tradition." For Hardy, the agrarian and speculative revolutions were irreversible and complete. They had opened gulfs between past and present which could not be bridged—differences of point of view. Through the compound images of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, he makes vivid to the modern imagination, the real differences among alternative views of life.

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