THE SYNTHETIC IMAGINATION:

AN APPROACH TO THE POETRY OF THOMAS HARDY

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But the old eagle did not grow gentle in haste; and, not fierce, no proper eagle. I am glad that he gentled, and that he did not come to it overnight. I suppose this happy dispensation visits any warrior if he lives in health long enough. Perhaps one simply grows into one's crowning intelligence.

--John Crowe Ransom,
"The Old Age of An Eagle"

INTRODUCTION

A major criticism raised against Thomas Hardy, voiced strongly during his own life and still heard today, concerns his supposed attitude of irrational pessimism. It will be my chief concern in this paper to show, without denying the predominant darkness that pervades his verse, that Hardy had a much larger vision than that possessed by a true pessimist. Hardy himself often stated that he was not a "pessimist," but, if one must use labels, a "meliorist." By this, he meant that he believed it possible that man in the future might evolve into a nobler, more rational being than his present actions reveal him to be. About the pessimism which his critics accused him of possessing, Hardy noted in his journal:

> As to pessimism. My motto is, first correctly diagnose the complaint--in this case human ills--and ascertain the cause: then set about finding a remedy if one exists. The motto or practice of the optimists is: Blind the eyes to the real malady, and use empirical panaceas to suppress the symptoms.[1]

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[1]Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928). (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 183.

Hardy did possess the tragic vision. He did see the "complaint," and he could not escape what he saw because he felt it too deeply. However, he was not defeated by the misery he observed in the human scene. The life force beat too strongly within him. He looked for a possible "remedy" for the maladies common to mortal existence. A reading of Hardy's verse clearly illustrates the poet's tragic view of things and his longing and earnest search for a "cure," for something that would make man's life, in the face of the inevitable destruction wrought by time, endurable and, perhaps, meaningful. It is my contention that the poet did find such a "cure," and that he found it in the power of the imagination to synthesize the experience of the past, present, and future as known by the individual into a whole that transcends the tragedy of temporal life. Through his imagination, the poet attained an attitude of reconciliation to the seeming absurdity of mortal endeavor in a ceaselessly changing universe. Hardy's work is finally positive in attitude and can be of service to all earnest men perplexed by the ultimately unanswerable questions of mortal existence. It can help such men to live their lives without falling into negation or hopelessness.

CHAPTER I

THE TRAGIC OVERVIEW

To see the Mother, naturing Nature, stand
All racked and wrung by her unfaithful lord,
Her hopes dismayed by his defiling hand,
Her passioned plans for bloom and beauty marred.

Where she would mint a perfect mould, an ill;
Where she would don divinest hues, a stain,
Over her purposed genial hour a chill,
Upon her charm of flawless flesh a blain:

Her loves dependent on a feature's trim,
A whole life's circumstance on hap of birth,
A soul's direction on a body's whim,
Eternal Heaven upon a day of Earth,
Is frost to flower of heroism and worth,
And fosterer of visions ghast and grim.

"Discouragement," p. 798

"Discouragement" is a fitting introduction to the nature of Hardy's tragic vision. It is a simple, straightforward, and bleak poetic statement of his view of life as bound by the destructive influence of time and subject to an often unpredictable and inexplicable Chance. It is significant, also, for its implication that the body and the soul are united as an organic whole, that the physical can determine the spiritual. The poem is a statement of

the "Worst" which Hardy refers to in another poem, "In Tenebris II," where he says, "that if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." There is no promise of any "Better" in "Discouragement," however. Its tone is one of complete hopelessness and resignation. The view the poet takes of insignificant man against an indecipherable universe and an all-powerful Time is one that applies "frost to flower of heroism and worth" and produces "visions ghast and grim." This is the declaration of a pessimist. However, it is not Hardy's only word or his last. It is the "Worst" which must first be faced before the effort to find a "Better" can be begun.

Hardy illustrates a tragic view of the condition of man on earth symbolically in "The Caged Goldfinch": The poet views a goldfinch imprisoned in a cage that has been placed "on a recent grave." The only sound that can be heard in the surrounding area is that of the small bird's "hops from stage to stage." The poet says of the bird,

> There was inquiry in its wistful eye,
> And once it tried to sing;
> Of him or her who placed it there, and why,
> No one knew anything. (p. 461)

The prisoner is bewildered and saddened by the mystery of its situation. The human condition is comparable to that of the caged bird. Man has as little knowledge of his

origin and purpose of existence as the goldfinch. Like the goldfinch, he inhabits a silent universe. A note from Hardy's journal is relevant to the theme of this poem:

> This hum of the wheel--the roar of London! What is it composed of? Hurry, speech, laughters, moans, cries of little children. The people in this tragedy laugh, sing, smoke, toss off wines, etc., make love to girls in drawing rooms and areas; and yet are playing their parts in the tragedy just the same. Some wear jewels and feathers, some wear rags. All are caged birds; the only difference lies in the size of the cage. This too is part of the tragedy.[2]

The activities of men, like those of the goldfinch, occur over a waiting grave. This is the fundamental tragedy of human life as Hardy viewed it. All action, in the face of an inevitable death, appears meaningless, and there are no certain answers available to those who question the purpose of their lives.

The highly developed Consciousness of man which enables him to raise questions concerning the mysteries of existence, questions that do not trouble the lower forms of animal life, is an important aspect of Hardy's tragic view of human life. In the poem "New Year's Eve," the poet engages in an imaginary discussion with God. In reply to

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[2]Florence Emily Hardy, The Early Life of Thomas Hardy (1840-1891) (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928), p. 224.

the poet's earnest questions concerning the reasons for human existence, God says,

> . . . "My labours--logicless--
> You may explain; not I:
> Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess
> That I evolved a Consciousness
> To ask for reasons why.
>
> "Strange that ephemeral creatures who
> By my own ordering are,
> Should see the shortness of my view,
> Use ethic tests I never knew,
> Or made provision for!" (p. 261)

The universe is logicless, and any explanations of it that man may make are self-imposed. After his reply, God sinks again into his old "raptness" to continue "working evermore/ In his unweeting way."

In the poem "Nature's Questioning," the poet again asks questions concerning any possible reasons for man's existence. There is no imaginary deity to answer him, and the poet is left alone and unheard, surrounded by the ceaseless processes of nature:

> No answerer I . . .
> Meanwhile the winds, and rains,
> And Earth's old glooms and pains
> Are still the same, and Life and Death are neighbors nigh. (p. 59)

Through the evolutionary process, man's consciousness has reached a point which enables him to make inquiries about the nature of an existence which he cannot rationally understand. In regard to this highly developed Consciousness,

Hardy noted in his journal,

> A woeful fact--that the human race is too extremely developed for its corporeal conditions, the nerves being evolved to an activity abnormal in such an environment. Even the higher animals are in excess in this respect. It may be questioned if Nature, or what we call Nature, so far back as when she crossed the line from invertebrates to vertebrates, did not exceed her mission. This planet does not supply the materials for happiness to higher existences. Other planets may, though one can hardly see how.[3]

Man's Consciousness has evolved to such a point that life on earth can be viewed as tragedy. Happiness would be more easily attainable if the human mode of perception were duller.

The fact that man's questioning intellect perceives God's way as "unweeting" can easily cause doubt and disbelief in any of the traditional concepts of a deity. Hardy was a doubter who struggled throughout his life for a faith that would be intellectually satisfying. This struggle is reflected in many of his poems. One of these poems is "Aquae Sulis," which recounts a conversation between a pagan Goddess of the ancient Romans and the Christian God above an excavation site. The Christian God says to the goddess, in reply to her choleric statements about the

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[3]Hardy, The Early Life, pp. 285-286.

Christian altar that has been built over her pagan temple:

> "Repress, O lady proud, your traditional ires;
> You know not by what a frail thread we equally hang;
> It is said we are images both--twitched by people's
> desires;
> And that I, as you, fail like a song men yesterday
> sang!" (pp. 353-354)

All godheads, to the skeptic, are mere "images" created by man to satisfy certain of his basic needs.

Doubt and the inability to believe in the traditional Christian God are expressed clearly in "The Oxen." It is Christmas Eve, and the poet as a young boy imagines the first Christmas Eve as it is commonly depicted while he is sitting by the hearthside "in a flock" of fellow believers. The unquestioning beliefs of youth have vanished in the poet's later years:

> So fair a fancy few would weave
> In these years! Yet, I feel,
> If someone said on Christmas Eve,
> "Come; see the oxen kneel,
>
> "In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
> Our childhood used to know,"
> I should go with him in the gloom,
> Hoping it might be so. (p. 439)

The poignancy of the poem derives from the conflict between what the poet wishes to believe and what his intellect prevents him from believing. The same desire for faith in a mystery which is contradicted by the reality perceived by the poet is expressed in a more direct and forceful way in

the poem "A Drizzling Easter Morning," which concludes with the lines:

> 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. (p. 623)

To believe that Christ is risen in a world where the same sordidness and ills have existed for centuries is impossible if the poet wishes to retain his intellectual integrity. Belief would change the tragic aspect of human existence, but belief cannot be honestly attained.

Faith is irrational in the face of the practical realities of man's life on earth and the knowledge gained from a look at the past history of the race. Hardy could never surrender his intellect to the irrational, yet at the same time he was an idealist committed to certain unseen values and possessing a natural admiration for those who were similarly committed. In a sense, this idealism is itself irrational. It is certainly impractical. The poem, "A Man (In Memory of H. of M.)," is an excellent expression of this paradox in Hardy's nature and in his verse. It recounts the story of a man who was hired to dismantle a "noble pile" with "stately beauties" of roof and wall. The man could not destroy such a fine specimen of architecture, and he gradually lost all opportunities for work. This loss

of work hastened his death. At his death, ". . . it was said, "A man intractable/ And curst is gone." The poet himself has a far different reaction, however. He says,

> The stones of that fair hall lie far and wide,
> And but a few recall its ancient mould;
> Yet when I pass the spot I long to hold
> As truth what fancy saith:
> "His protest lives where deathless things abide!"
> (p. 141)

The desire to believe in the truth of what the "fancy saith," to believe that there are certain elements or acts of human life which are immortal and which thus serve to give life meaning, is illustrated again in "The Church-Builder." The poem is a dramatic monologue of an architect who had "paid" his "all in hand and hoard" to build a magnificent church "To glorify the Lord." The architect sacrificed greatly to complete the structure. When his work was done, however, he suffered many harsh misfortunes, and "aims the best/ Were looking like the worst." Not only did he suffer personal misfortune, but his "votive work" enkindles "no burning faith." A time arrives when he can say,

> My gift to God seems futile, quite;
> The world moves as erstwhile;
> And powerful Wrong on feeble Right
> Tramples in olden style.
> My faith burns down,
> I see no crown;
> But Cares, and Griefs, and Guile. (p. 157)

In despair, the architect hangs himself inside the Church he built. Contemplating the effects of his planned suicide, he says,

> Well: Here at morn they'll light on one
> Dangling in mockery
> Of what he spent his substance on
> Blindly and uselessly! . . .
> "He might," they'll say,
> "Have built, some way,
> A cheaper gallows-tree!" (p. 158)

In an almost grotesque fashion, Hardy paints a startling portrait of a man searching for faith, believing he has found it, and dying when his faith appears to be only an illusion. The fate of the church-builder throws into high relief a significant facet of the tragedy of the human dilemma.

The purpose of man's life on earth cannot be comprehended rationally. The universe appears to be bleak and without purpose to the logical mind. "The Darkling Thrush" is an extremely effective portrait of man living in a world which appears barren and meaningless to his limited understanding. The poem suggests that there is some knowledge that is beyond man's limitations to know but that can be perceived by the "aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small" which

> Had chosen thus to fling his soul
> Upon the growing gloom. (p. 137)

The poet observes no cause for the small bird's enthusiasm in

the bleak world that surrounds him:

> So little cause for carolings
> Of such ecstatic sound
> Was written on terrestrial things
> Afar or nigh around,
> That I could think there trembled through
> His happy good-night air
> Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew
> And I was unaware. (p. 137)

Hardy is open to the possibility that reasons, explanations, and a fuller knowledge of the universe exist but are not attainable to the limited vision and understanding of man. Perhaps the thrush is aware of a world that would infuse mortal life on earth with purpose and meaning if man could see this world. Man may be a creature of limited vision, and, because the poet is a man, he can only guess at the knowledge he cannot possess, the world he cannot envision.

Not all of the tragedy of human existence as Hardy viewed it stems from man's relation to the supernatural, to Nature, or to forces outside himself and beyond his control. Many of the tragic occurrences on earth are social in origin and arise from the manner in which men live in the world. War is just one example of such tragedy. In "The Man He Killed," a soldier comments after killing his enemy in battle:

> "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." (p. 269)

The frequently aggressive and irrational policy of nations is the cause for such killings as the one recounted in this poem. A man kills a possible friend because he wears a different uniform from his own. Natural human relations are distorted, perhaps needlessly, when society places a man in a position where he must kill his fellow man.

"The Chapel-Organist" illustrates, in a context other than war, the unnecessary and useless harm that man can cause his fellow man when he adheres to principles, beliefs, or ideals that tend to undermine the true significance of the individual human life. The poem is a soliloquy of a young girl who for many years has played the organ in her church on Sundays. She realizes that she is about to be dismissed from her position because of certain relations she has had with various men. The girl declares, "I have craved minstrelsy more than lovers, or beauty, or gold," and her playing supports her claim. The officials of the church do not wish to dismiss her since she is a fine musician, but because there is "too much sex in her build" and she has "A bosom too full for her age" they feel they must. However, the deacons decide to retain the girl's services when she offers to play for nothing out of love

for her art. Once more she is observed in the company of a few young men and told she must leave. On the last Sunday she is to play, she takes poison while playing. Before she dies, she meditates:

> I have never once minced it. Lived chaste I have not.
> Heaven knows it above! . . .
> But past all the heavings of passion--it's music has
> been my life-love! . . . (p. 602)

The young girl's beauty, vitality, and lack of hypocrisy have destroyed her life. The poet implies that there is definitely something wrong with religious ethics and social conventions which can help destroy such a worthwhile and healthy life. The tragedy of the chapel-organist's death would not have occurred in a society which was more closely attuned to natural law. Human law has contradicted nature and caused unfortunate results.

A more obvious statement of the sad consequences which follow upon man's obstructing nature is made in the poem, "Horses Aboard." The poet speaks of horses stabled aboard a ship:

> They are horses of war,
> And are going to where there is fighting afar;
> But they gaze through their eye-holes unwitting they are,
> And that in some wilderness, gaunt and ghast,
> Their bones will bleach ere a year has passed,
> And the item be as "war-waste" classed.--
> And when the band booms, and the folk say "Good-bye!"
> And the shore slides astern, they appear wrenched awry
> From the scheme Nature planned for them,--wondering
> why. (p. 753)

The consequences of man's interfering with the natural lives of horses are sad, but when man interferes with the life of his fellow man in much the same manner the sadness becomes tragic. The implication is that life would be more bearable and easier to enjoy if men were more sensitive to the natural order than they are at present.

"The Dear" is a poignant illustration of the manner in which social conventions can interfere with and destroy the natural bonds that connect a man with those around him. It also portrays a world that seems to have become insensitive to the power of beauty and grown dull rather than wise. The effect of the poem is subtle and can best be felt by quoting it in its entirety:

I plodded to Fairmile Hill-top, where
A maiden one fain would guard
From every hazard and every care
Advanced on the roadside sward.

I wondered how succeeding suns
Would shape her wayfarings,
And wished some Power might take such ones
Under Its warding wings.

The busy breeze came up the hill
And smartened her cheek to red,
And frizzled her hair to a haze. With a will
"Good-morning, my Dear!" I said.

She glanced from me to the far-off gray,
And, with proud severity,
"Good-morning to you--though I may say
I am not <u>your</u> Dear," quoth she:

"For I am the Dear of one not here--
One far from his native land!"--
And she passed me by; and I did not try
To make her understand. (p. 257)

The girl's curt reply is not very surprising. She is not uncivil but merely rigidly proper from the point of view of social convention. Her social training prevents her from perceiving any motivation behind the man's greeting other than one which society has told her she cannot morally tolerate. It is this fact which gives the poem its poignant quality.

There is a tragic element to the invisible social conventions that unnaturally separate man from man, but there is also potential tragedy in the chance destiny that brings two people together who should never have been united to each other. One of Hardy's favorite themes is that of marriage between two people who realize too late that they are incompatible. The poem, "Mismet," recounts a meeting between a man and a woman. The first stanza concentrates on the man's feelings for the girl, and the second depicts the relationship from the woman's point of view. The poet is omniscient and can see more deeply and clearly into the lovers' hearts than they can themselves. His better perception enables him to predict the future of the two together. In the last lines of the poem, the poet says that the charms

possessed by the girl's lover

> Were the wrong ones for her, and ever would be so,
> While the heritor of the right it would have saved
> her soul to know! (p. 579)

The girl, however, is not aware of this, and the poet implies that this lack of self-knowledge or understanding will destroy her chances for salvation on earth. The two are doomed to an unfulfilled life together.

"At Tea" is a variation on the theme of mismatched destinies. It is the first poem in a series of poems that Hardy entitled "Satires of Circumstance," and depicts a newly married couple entertaining a woman guest for tea. The poet says:

> And the happy young housewife does not know
> That the woman beside her was first his choice,
> Till the fates ordained it could not be so. . . .
> Betraying nothing in look or voice
> The guest sits smiling and sips her tea,
> And he throws her a stray glance yearningly. (p. 391)

We are not informed how the "fates ordained it could not be so," for this is not important in the context of the poem. The significant matter is that the man is married to the wrong woman, and his wife knows only an illusion of happiness. The situation is one of tragic potential because it was the "fates" who "ordained" that the man should not marry the woman he loved. There are forces at work in the universe which are beyond man's control. These forces, these

unnamed "fates" can bring misery to human life.

The limitation of human powers of foresight is the cause for much sorrow and unhappiness on earth. "On the Tune Called 'The Old-Hundred-and-Fourth'" is addressed to an old or departed loved one. It is a reminiscence of a wasted past which had provided the poet with the opportunity to sing this old church hymn together with the loved one. The poet is aware of this neglected opportunity only now that it has passed, and he questions in a tone of rueful nostalgia:

> Or shall we, when for ever
> In Sheol we abide,
>
> Sing it in desolation,
> As we might long have done
> On Sundays or on weekdays
> With love and exultation
> Before our sands had run? (p. 587)

Opportunity missed because of lack of vision or understanding is the theme of several of Hardy's poems. "The Going," for example, is addressed to a loved one who died unexpectedly at a time when the two lovers were not on the best of terms with each other. Now that the woman is dead, the poet can only utter in resignation:

> Well, well! All's past amend,
> Unchangeable. It must go. (p. 319)

The pain he now feels he would not be feeling if he had been more fully aware of life and life's possibilities. The theme

of unfulfilled opportunities and ideals is treated again in "Surview." The poet is reminiscing. He hears his own voice talking to him from the fire in the hearth, admonishing him for the arrogance he has displayed in his life. Its accusations include such comments as, "You held not to whatsoever was true," "You slighted her that endureth all," and "You taught not that which you set about." The poet failed to recognize the possibilities life offered and to take advantage of these possibilities.

Death may be the one thing that can make one aware of life's possibilities. However, most men live without any vivid consciousness of their inevitable end and realize too late the opportunities they have wasted. "If You Had Known" is a beautiful statement of a past that is irrevocably gone, and which the poet failed to live as he now wishes he had. The first lines of the poem are a reminiscence of the joyful past the poet knew with his beloved. The poem concludes in a tone of regret at having not realized during the happy days when the two lovers were young that "Fifty years thence" the loved one would be dead. The relationship might have taken on an added intensity if the poet had been consciously aware of the death that awaited the one he loved. He states that if he had known of the death that would come fifty years

later, he would have then done what he does now. The poet meditates:

> . . . yea, had you foreseen
> That on the tomb of the selfsame one, gone where
> The dawn of every day is as the close is,
> You would lay roses! (p. 598)

Man's limited vision prevents him from living as he might live if he did not possess his mortal limitation. This fact may bring sorrow, and is an aspect of Hardy's tragic view of human existence.

Just as a man may have opportunities which he fails to take full advantage of and live to regret his failure, so also may he conceive expectations that are never fulfilled and live to regret his false hopes. Life is complex, and misery can come from many directions. The theme of expectations that are not fulfilled is clearly illustrated in "A Two-Years' Idyll." The lovers depicted in the poem spent their first two years together enjoyably enough, but with the belief that these two years were but "the prelude to plays/ Soon to come--larger, life-fraught." Now, as the poet reminisces, he says, "such beginning was all." Those first two years were "A preface without any book," and the fact that the lovers looked at the beginning of their life together as but the harbinger of better things to come prevented them from appreciating that time as they might have.

Hardy states this same theme more explicitly and on a more universal scale in "Yell'ham-Wood's Story," where he has the ancient woods saying, "Life offers--to deny!" This denial is part of the tragedy that makes up much of human experience.

It is predictable that a poet who drew so much of his thematic material from society's unnatural rigidities and the limitations of human nature should also have been concerned with the states of hopelessness and negation into which human life can lapse. "The Ivy Wife" illustrates such a state of negative despair. The poem is a successfully wrought allegory of unrequited love and of betrayal in love. The voice in the poem is that of an ivy vine which longed to wrap itself around a beech tree, but the beech tried to poison it. The relationship it attempted to establish with a plane proved unsuccessful, and the vine next wrapped itself about an ash. The vine speaks in the guise of a female:

> In new affection next I strove
> To coll an ash I saw,
> And he in trust received my love;
> Till with my soft green claw
> I cramped and bound him as I wove . . .
> Such was my love: ha-ha! (p. 50)

The laugh of arrogance is squelched in the following stanza of the poem, as the vine's selfishness results in unforeseen misfortune for both her and her lover. She says:

> But in my triumph I lost sight
> Of afterhaps. Soon he,

> Being bark-bound, flagged, snapped, fell outright,
> And in his fall felled me! (p. 50)

A lack of foresight flings the vine to the ground, and its egoistic laugh becomes a cry of despair. With the passage of time, optimistic hope is shown to be an illusion.

The illusion which stems from a lack of vision is poignantly illustrated in "At a Pause in a Country Dance." With his objective knowledge of the true state of affairs, the reader can see that the contentment of the two lovers in the poem who are at a dance together is false, and their situation takes on a pathetic quality. The man and girl are enjoying themselves, while from the window of the dance hall one can see a light from the home where the girl lives with her grandparents, who care for the infant she bore. The poet says:

> --From the homestead, seen yon, the small glow
> Still adventured forth over the white,
> Where the child slept, unknowing who sired it,
> In the cradle of wicker tucked tight,
> And its grandparents, nodding, admired it
> In elbow-chairs through the slow night. (p. 747)

The small light from the homestead shines as a reminder of the girl's true situation which she has chosen to ignore. The girl is married, but her husband has no knowledge that her child was fathered not by him but by her illicit lover. The truth has been concealed, and the false state of the situation

imparts a premonition of future disaster and disillusionment.

The disillusion a man may experience through love is the subject of "Neutral Tones," generally acclaimed as one of Hardy's best poems. The imagery of the poem very successfully supports its theme, and, for this reason, it is quoted in full:

> We stood by a pond that winter day,
> And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
> And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
> --They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.
>
> Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
> Over tedious riddles of years ago;
> And some words played between us to and fro
> On which lost the more by our love.
>
> The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
> Alive enough to have strength to die;
> And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
> Like an ominous bird a-wing. . . .
>
> Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
> And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
> Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
> And a pond edged with grayish leaves. (p. 9)

Natural surroundings support the mood of the speaker whose presentiments of disaster are fulfilled. He now knows that "love deceives," and the world has become bare, gray, and accursed by God. It is a reflection of the inner state of the disillusioned lover.

The poem, "He Abjures Love," restates this same theme and advances it a step further. The narrator has experienced

love, but it has brought him only "fears," "desolations," and "disquietings." He implies that love is only illusion, and declares that he will no longer be subject to such illusion:

> --I speak as one who plumbs
> Life's dim profound,
> One who at length can sound
> Clear views and certain.
> But--after love what comes?
> A scene that lours,
> A few sad vacant hours,
> And then, the Curtain. (p. 221)

The narrator is plunged into a state of complete negation through his disillusionment. This is the tragic result of the limited vision of mortal foresight. Man cannot predict the destruction and ruined hope that will occur with the passage of time.

Man's mortality and the fact that all he knows of joy and beauty, and all the meaning with which he may perhaps invest life is ephemeral, are, perhaps, the foundation for Hardy's tragic vision. Human happiness is rare enough, but when it does occur, it is doomed to pass. The knowledge of this can mar present happiness, and it leaves the time that follows a period of joy bleaker than it might have been if such joy had never been experienced. The man who lives with the transitoriness of human life ever present before him can never experience a moment of pure, untarnished felicity. The architect in the

poem, "Heiress and Architect," would seem to be such a man. The architect tells the vigorous, life-loving heiress that he will build

> "In true accord with prudent fashionings
> For such vicissitudes as living brings,
> And thwarting not the law of stable things,
> That will I do." (p. 67)

It is the "law of stable things" that motivates the architect to contradict all the heiress's plans for her new home. She would have "open ogive-work, that scent and hue/ Of buds, and travelling bees, may come in through." The architect calls this an "idle whim" and tells her she must prepare "For winters freeze." The heiress would like "wide fronts of crystal glass" in order to display her glory to the outside world, but the architect tells her that "you will tire" and "Those house them best who house for secrecy." To her request for an elaborate bed-chamber "Wherein my Love may greet me, I my love," the architect responds, "This, too, is ill . . . For you will fade." To the heiress's final faint request for some private loft in a "narrow winding turret . . . where I may grieve alone," the architect replies:

> . . . Give space (since life ends unawares)
> To hale a coffined corpse adown the stairs;
> For you will die. (p. 68)

The architect's voice is that of ever-flowing time and inevitable death, and man, like the intimidated heiress, cannot

escape it.

"During Wind and Rain" is an admirably conceived poem in four stanzas, each of which is a tableau of a family enjoying different activities together. The first pictures them singing in the house; the second, walking in the garden; the third, breakfasting outside; and the fourth, moving from one dwelling to another. At the conclusion of each stanza, there is a hard reminder of the passage of time, until the fourth stanza ends with the lines:

> Ah, no; the years, the years;
> Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs.
> (p. 466)

The final resting place of all men is the grave. The cry of "the years, the years" is heard again in "The Change," where the poet reminisces over a week of perfect love he had known in the past which can never be known again. He says:

> O the doom by someone spoken--
> Who shall unseal the years, the years!--
> O the doom that gave no token,
> When nothing of bale saw we:
> O the doom by someone spoken,
> O the heart by someone broken,
> The heart whose sweet reverberances are all time leaves to me. (p. 427)

The fact that the two lovers saw "nothing of bale" makes the irredeemable past all the more heart-rending to recall. If a man could see his future, he might be better able to reconcile

himself to life. In "Bereft," the poet recalls the life he knew with a woman he loved who is now dead. His recollections make him long for death. He lives in continual hope that his love will return, yet he knows his hope is futile, for she has passed away with time. In complete despair, he says:

> Leave the door unbarred,
> The clock unwound,
> Make my lone bed hard--
> Would 'twere underground! (p.193)

Hardy's tragic vision perhaps had its grounding in his intense and brooding consciousness of the inevitable fact of death, but he heightened the tragic implications of this consciousness by meditating on what remained of a man's life after he had died. If man does possess any life after death, this life exists only in the minds of those the deceased knew on earth who survive him. There is no true immortality, for eventually all memories of the dead one will be erased by time, and there will be no traces of his existence on earth. This belief is stated clearly in the poem, "His Immortality." In each of the four stanzas of this poem, the memories of the dead man harbored by those who knew and loved him grow increasingly dimmer with the passage of time, until the poet says in the last stanza:

> 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. (p. 131)

There is no true immortality, for it is only a question of how long a period of time must pass before a man is finally dead. Hardy's view of life is totally organic in that he makes no guesses as to if or how the soul survives the body after death. To the best of his knowledge as a mortal man, the soul dies with the body. Immortality must be earthly if it is to be had at all, and the poem clearly illustrates the irony of this kind of "immortality."

The thought of death and inevitable extinction need not be tragic, however. In "After the Last Breath," a sense of "numb relief" is felt at the death of a "well-beloved" because she "is prisoner in the cell/ Of Time no more." But this relief is a reflex action in response to being imprisoned in a temporal world, a fate which is viewed in this poem as being worse than death. The relief is not positive in mood, for to die and to live are both sad. It is only a question of which appears worse to the individual. The real tragedy arises from the fact that man cannot escape the sadness. Like the goldfinch in "The Caged Goldfinch," he is born to live and to die, trapped within his cage.

In the poem, "Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave?,"

Hardy assumes an almost cynical attitude in response to the extinction that he feels is inevitable. A dead woman speaks from the grave to someone who she knows is digging on her grave. She hypothesizes that it might be her "loved one," her "dearest kin," or, perhaps, her "enemy," but none of these guesses is correct. It is the dead woman's dog that digs on her grave, and in response to his dead mistress's gratitude over "a dog's fidelity," the dog says, in what is an ironically bitter last stanza:

> "Mistress, I dug upon your grave
> To bury a bone, in case
> I should be hungry near this spot
> When passing on my daily trot.
> I am sorry, but I quite forgot
> It was your resting-place." (p. 311)

This forgotten "resting-place" is what life comes to in the end. It is this vision which, more than anything else, gives Hardy's tragic view of life its intensity and its enduring relevance.

Death and extinction are the two facts which define a man's aloneness. At the moment of our last breath and in the grave, we are isolated from our fellow men. Hardy was strongly aware of this isolation, and his vivid consciousness of the end which closes the days of all men may have contributed greatly to the strength of this awareness. The universe, as Hardy viewed it, is indifferent to the

lives of men, and death is a biological fact beyond man's power to alter. This indifference and man's fundamental isolation in the face of it are brilliantly illustrated in "The Harbour Bridge." The poem is a tableau picturing a bridge stretching its frame across a harbor and seen in relief against a sky dimly illumined by a sun which has just set. The poet first presents his impression of the bridge:

> From here, the quay, one looks above to mark
> The bridge across the harbour, hanging dark
> Against the day's-end sky, fair-green in glow
> Over and under the middle archway's bow:
> It draws its skeleton where the sun has set,
> Yea, clear from cutwater to parapet;
> On which mild glow, too, lines of rope and spar
> Trace themselves black as char. (p. 741)

The bridge, as it is observed against the early evening sky, can easily be seen as representative of a man's span of life. Painters are at work beneath it, and

> High up across the bridge the burghers glide
> As cut black-paper portraits hastening on
> In conversation none knows what upon: . . .
> (pp. 741-742)

Life unfolds in its various aspects above and beneath the bridge's span:

> There trails the dreamful girl, who leans and stops,
> There presses the practical woman to the shops, . . .
> (p. 742)

A sailor and his wife are seen meeting on the bridge, and the observant eye of the poet draws in on them to overhear

their conversation:

> Both pause. She says: "I've looked for you. I thought
> We'd make it up." Then no words can be caught.
> At last: "Won't you come home?" She moves still nigher:
> "'Tis comfortable, with a fire." (p. 742)
>
> "No," he says gloomily. "And, anyhow,
> I can't give up the other woman now:
> You should have talked like that in former days,
> When I was last home." They go different ways.
> (p. 742)

The poem leaves one with a sense of muted tragedy. Men pursue their small affairs separated from one another beneath a dark sky which is mindless of the lives that are lived beneath it.

In "Nobody Comes," the poet concentrates on his own isolation in an unsympathetic world. He singles himself out as alone in the midst of his fellow men. The aloneness is personal in this instance. The "telegraph wire/ To the town" reminds the poet that there is a life that goes on around him in which he does not share. A "car comes up" to the poet's gate, but, he says, "It has nothing to do with me," and passes by leaving him "mute by the gate . . . again alone." The nighttime setting of the poem intensifies the blackness Hardy feels in his separation from those around him.

A more explicit statement of this same theme of isolation is made in "In Tenebris II," in which Hardy gives

several reasons for his feeling that he is different and separate from other men. He cannot enjoy life in the same easy, careless way that they can because of his vision. He looks at himself as guilty of some offense against life for this vision and says:

> Let him in whose ears the low-voiced Best is killed
> by the clash of the First,
> Who holds that if way to the Better there be, it
> exacts a full look at the Worst,
> Who feels that delight is a delicate growth cramped
> by crookedness, custom, and fear,
> Get him up and be gone as one shaped awry; he
> disturbs the order here. (p. 154)

That Hardy could look at himself seriously enough to write a poem about it as "one shaped awry" can be read from a detached vantage point as an indirect comment on the tragic scheme of the world and its affairs. The poet's feelings of isolation were obviously a cause of sorrow to himself, and this sorrow induces us to look at our lives with the same tragic vision with which Hardy viewed his own existence. We share in the poet's mortal condition.

The tragic overview expressed by Hardy's poetry is composed of many elements. Based on the inevitability of death and the destructive force of time, the poet's tragic consciousness is intensified by an awareness that human beings are not free but prisoners within a cage whose walls are predetermined, by the questions concerning infinity raised

by finite minds which must dwell in doubt, by a vision which can see only the present, and that not always truly, and which is haunted by the past, and by the conventions of a society which has lost sight of the natural man. After he has surveyed mortal existence from his individual standpoint, Hardy, like the chronicler of Ecclesiastes, utters the sigh, "Vanitas Vanitatum." This sigh is heard clearly in several poems.

"On One Who Lived and Died Where He Was Born" sketches in bare outline the birth and death of a man born in November. The first stanza of the poem presents the infant descending "His birth-chamber stairs/ For the very first time," and the second stanza concerns the "frail aged figure" who "Ascended those stairs/ For the very last time." The life of the "Wise child of November!," as does all life, begins and ends in the same place. The old man is called a "child," signifying that his long life really taught him nothing of much importance besides the great overriding fact that a man is born to die. He is "wise" because he

> . . . saw quick in time
> As a vain pantomime
> Life's tending, its ending,
> The worth of its fame. (p. 624)

When reduced to its barest, essential outline, life is nothing but a "vain pantomime." Even love does not transcend

the fundamental vanity of the mortal lot as is clearly illustrated in "The Young Churchwarden." The churchwarden surveys the narrator of the poem and his love together in church, and

> . . . his vanquished air
> Hinted that his dream was done,
> And I saw he had begun
> To understand. (p. 429)

The narrator's self-satisfied pride is undone "When love's viol was unstrung," and when the girl sought by the two men in their youth lies dead, the narrator conjectures concerning the churchwarden:

> Does he smile from upper air:
> "Ah, my friend, your dream is done;
> And 'tis <u>you</u> who have begun
> To understand!" (p. 429)

In the face of the ultimate knowledge to be gained from life, that all is born only to pass, the narrator sees that success in love is not as important as he, in his youthful naivety, had assumed.

As its title might indicate, "Nothing Matters Much" is a poem which serves well as a conclusion to a discussion of the tragedy which Hardy saw as the central fact of man's life on earth. The objective narrator of this poem gives an account of a man, now dead, who often said while living that "Nothing matters much." This was his response to anything "befallen unduly" and to his knowledge of "the letter of the

law." He would often "shape in word/ That nothing needed much lamenting" while his wife sat with him and sadly assented. Now that he is dead "The Flamborough roar his psalmodies" and the wind is "his priest." What the man said while active has been affirmed by his death, and the narrator says:

> And while I think of his bleak bed,
> Of Time that builds, of Time that shatters,
> Lost to all thought is he, who said
> "Nothing much matters." (p. 788)

The death of an individual is inconsequential before the flux of Time. Man is a part of the natural world and subject to its inescapable laws. Nothing is of any real importance in a universe that is constantly changing and renewing itself.

Men are born slaves, but slaves incapable of submitting to their bondage, in most cases, without questions, doubts, and rebellion. The lives of those who, out of innate wisdom, faith, ignorance, or stupidity accept their subservience are no less tragic than the lives of those who cannot make such an acceptance. Hardy recognized this, and this recognition made him incapable of ever submitting before the tragedy of mortal existence. His tragic vision has its well-springs not in fear or the desire for an easy escape in negativity but in honesty and a surveillance of life as a whole. In his journal, Hardy defends his world view in

lines referring to Browning, whose optimism was and still is often contrasted with his own "pessimism":

> Browning said (in a line cited against me so often):
> "Never dreamed though right were worsted wrong
> would triumph."
> Well, that was a lucky dreamlessness for Browning. It kept him comfortably unaware of those millions who cry with the Chorus in "Hellas": "Victorious Wrong, with vulture scream, Salutes the rising sun!"--or with Hyllus in the Trachiniae: "Mark the vast injustice of the gods."[4]

Hardy's tragic view of life is justified from an artistic standpoint not only by its bare honesty but also by the fact that it was used as a touchstone for a further examination of life. The chafing against the bonds of mortality, which continued throughout the poet's life, gave him deep insights into human life and allowed him to look at existence from a variety of attitudes which ultimately transcend the tragic vision which is their origin. The following chapter will deal with some of these insights and attitudes, as we begin to trace Hardy's gradual ascent from the tragic overview.

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[4]Hardy, The Later Years, p. 184.

CHAPTER II

MEMORY, TRAGEDY'S HANDMAIDEN

I saw her in an ageing shape
    Where beauty used to be;
That her fond phantom lingers there
    Is only known to me.

--"Memory and I," p. 170.

Memory can be viewed as the handmaiden of the tragedy depicted in much of Hardy's verse because it is a man's memory that enables him to look back upon his past and to contrast the happy, or what now seem happy, events of that past with the present. It is memory which allows a man to feel the sense of loss. From this sense of loss, however, something is gained. Looking back searchingly on one's past years, especially if those years are many, enables one to perceive a pattern in one's life experiences. Although regret for the past may trouble a man, the pattern of time's ebb and flow which can be discerned in his own existence may well serve him as a source of strength and of inspiration to continue. This pattern helps him into the perhaps sad but nevertheless saving knowledge that he is not the center of

the universe but only a minor part of a much larger whole that has existed before him and that will continue to exist after his death. The pattern that memory aids a man to discern in his individual life is a replica, in a small way, of the pattern of the lives of the totality of men who have ever existed and who will continue to exist later. It thus helps a man to perceive the humanity he shares with all men and unites him in a common brotherhood. Memory served Hardy in this manner. It accompanies and intensifies the tragic view of life presented in his poetry, while at the same time it helps him to affirm his common humanity and provides him with the strength to endure.

"I Look Into My Glass" is a short poem dealing with the paradox of a feeble old age troubled by the stirring memories of younger days. The narrator looks into the mirror and views his "wasting skin," wishing that his "heart had shrunk as thin!" If his heart would shrink as his skin does, he would be "undistrest" and could wait for death with "equanimity." This does not happen, as the narrator declares in the last stanza:

> But Time, to make me grieve,
> Part steals, lets part abide;
> And shakes this fragile frame at eve
> With throbbings of noontide. (p. 72)

The heart that feels as it did while he was young troubles

the narrator in his later years by the contradictions it causes. The poem is significant in that it reveals that the poet, though elderly, still feels the impulses of a youthful feeling heart. Such a heart would keep memories of earlier days vivid and alive for the poet. Indeed, it is just such remembrances that trouble the narrator in this poem.

The endurance and resolve that Hardy the artist felt in the face of seeming meaninglessness are revealed in the poem, "I Looked Up From My Writing." While writing a book, the poet chances to glance up from his work and see the moon shining through his window. He imaginatively asks the moon, "What are you doing there?," and the moon responds that it has been looking for the body of a man who "has put his life-light out" after hearing that his son who "has injured none" has been killed in "brutish battle." The moon goes on to say:

> "And now I am curious to look
> Into the blinkered mind
> Of one who wants to write a book
> In a world of such a kind." (p. 519)

The poet is "overwrought" by the moon's temper and edges "to shun her view" because, as he says:

> . . . I felt assured she thought me
> One who should drown him too. (p. 519)

This obviously fictitious dialogue between the poet and the moon makes us aware that Hardy entertained doubts about his occupation as a writer. Perhaps he should end his life rather than attempt to deal with the absurdities of life that go on about him even while he works. The thought that was entertained passed, however, and Hardy continued his work. Memory would have a great deal to do with preserving the desire to go on, because memory is of great use to the artist who attempts to make sense out of a manifold of experience and knowledge which, if looked at only briefly, appears to be nonsense. The poet, by facing the moon's curiosity, affirms his existence.

This affirmation is expressed in "In Tenebris I." The tone of this poem is one of acceptance rather than celebration as should be expected from a poet who sees the tragedy that Hardy sees. Nevertheless, an attitude of fearless endurance is voiced before Time's destructive cycle. The poem is set in wintertime, the time of death for many living things. "Flower-petals flee," "Birds faint in dread," "Leaves freeze to dun," but the poet declares of this winter that his

> . . . bereavement-pain
> It cannot bring again:
> Twice no one dies. (p. 153)

The man who has died spiritually in the past confronts the future without many of his old fears. His experience has brought him knowledge and enables him to shed the hope that might cause future disillusionment. As the poet says:

> Black is night's cope;
> But death will not appal
> One who, past doubtings all,
> Waits in unhope. (p. 153)

Hardy's memories of his past are used positively, no matter how bleakly this positive attitude may be expressed. Memory renews old wounds, but, at the same time, it strengthens the will to endure.

The power of memory to preserve the past in a man's mind makes it a haunting power in the present. This is illustrated in the poem, "In Front of the Landscape." The landscape referred to in the title is the poet's own life seen in retrospect. In the first stanza of the poem, the poet depicts himself

> Plunging and labouring on in a tide of visions,
> Dolorous and dear, (p. 285)

These visions prevent him from seeing clearly the old familiar landscape about him. All the landmarks known so well appear but as "a ghost-like gauze." In bewilderment, the poet asks:

> What were the re-creations killing the daytime
> As by the night? (p. 285)

The next several stanzas enumerate the "infinite spectacles" that clouded the poet's sight. They include "speechful faces, gazing insistent,"

> . . . shining sights, sweet seasons
> Further in date;
> Instruments of strings with the tenderest passion
> Vibrant, (p. 286)

and also "Later images" of the "Clay cadavers of those who had shared in the dramas." It is these that "captured" the poet "in their pleading dumbness" as he walked beside the sea. The main reason that these images of the past arose to trouble the poet is guilt. He says of these ghosts of the imaginative memory:

> For, their lost revisiting manifestations
> In their live time
> Much had I slighted, caring not for their purport,
> (p. 286)

The guilty regret he feels for these old slights, now irredeemable, is what has sparked the poet's memory. He sees these people of his past who are now dead

> As they were ghosts avenging their slights by my
> bypast
> Body-borne eyes, (p. 287)

The last lines of the poem very effectively evoke the picture of a man troubled in mind by the living dead. The "passing people" question when they see him:

"Ah--whose is this dull form that perambulates,
seeing nought
Round him that looms
Whithersoever his footsteps turn in his farings,
Save a few tombs?" (p. 287)

In "Paths of Former Time" it is one specific tomb that troubles the memory of the poem's narrator. As "In Front of the Landscape," this memory of a departed one prevents the narrator from viewing the paths he once walked as he did while the dead one lived. It is the sheer sense "of the lack of one" that forces the narrator to declare in the first lines of the poem:

No; no;
It must not be so:
They are the ways we do not go. (p. 496)

The following portion of the poem makes it clear that objectively the old paths have not changed in appearance. It may thus seem to be foolishness that prompts the narrator to make the declaration he does at the beginning, but as he says at the poem's conclusion:

Had you been
Sharer of that scene
You would not ask while it bites in keen

Why it is so
We can no more go
By the summer paths we used to know! (p. 496)

The summer paths are gone forever with the death of the loved one because the keen memory of the days shared walking these

paths with the beloved has made the summertime unbearable. The powers of the imaginative memory to recreate the bliss of the past tarnish the chances for present contentment.

The past can influence strongly the mind of one with a vivid imagination. This influence can separate a man from the living, making him a loner among men. "The Voice of Things" recounts the gradual accumulation of the years and the experience and knowledge they bring to alienate a man from his present surroundings. Each stanza of this three-stanza poem describes one specific scene as experienced by the poet at three different periods of his life. When he "paced the headlands" as a youth:

> The waves huzza'd like a multitude below
> In the sway of an all-including joy
> Without cloy. (p. 401)

When he heard the same waves twenty years later, the poet says:

> . . . I heard the waters wagging in a long ironic laughter
> At the lot of men, and all the vapoury
> Things that be. (p. 402)

In the third stanza, the poet stands on the old headlands as an elderly man. The waves have once more changed their voice:

> . . . they supplicate now--like a congregation there
> Who murmur the Confession--I outside,
> Prayer denied. (p. 402)

A state of alienation and resignation that contrasts vividly with the egoistical hope of youth and the shallow wisdom of middle age now dominates. The voice the poet hears in the waves is that of the dead past from which he is separated. He cannot repair the damage wrought by thoughtless deeds of his past but must live with his sense of regret and failure. The days spent with deceased loved ones cannot be recaptured, and he must bear the intense memory of their perishable bliss.

The power of the memory to haunt a man is dramatically illustrated in two narrative poems in which Hardy abandons the first person voice he uses in most of his poetry. "San Sebastian" is a dialogue between a retired army Sergeant and another whose identity is not disclosed. In the first stanza of the poem, the Sergeant is questioned:

> "Why, Sergeant, stray on the Ivel Way,
> As though at home there were spectres rife?
> From first to last 'twas a proud career!
> And your sunny years with a gracious wife
> Have brought you a daughter dear. (p. 17)

The Sergeant, in response, explains how, many years ago in the mad heat of battle, he had raped a young girl in the defeated enemy town. The girl "raised her beseeching eyes" to the Sergeant, who says:

> . . . Fatefully
> I copied those eyes for my punishment
> In begetting the girl you see! (p. 19)

His daughter possesses the same eyes that the young Spanish girl he raped possessed, and those eyes are to the Sergeant a "God-set brand/ Like Cain's." He states dejectedly:

> "And I nightly stray on the Ivel Way
> As though at home there were spectres rife;
> I delight me not in my proud career;
> And 'tis coals of fire that a gracious wife
> Should have brought me a daughter dear!" (p. 19)

The Sergeant is tormented by his hypocrisy before the world of which he is kept vividly aware by his daughter's eyes. His knowledge of his past deed, which he has not shared with his wife, haunts him and forces him to wander alone at night in fear of the "spectres" that he sees at home. Although the Sergeant's guilt may seem exaggerated to the modern reader, "San Sebastian" nevertheless illustrates Hardy's awareness of the power of memory to revive the past in the present.

In "The Burghers," the awareness of the power of memory to haunt the present is possessed by one of the characters. He is a husband whose wife intends to desert him for another man. Along with his friend, the outraged husband plans to gain his revenge by killing his wife and her lover. However, he sees the true depth of his wife's love for this other man when she shields him from the knife in her husband's angered hand with her body. The husband says:

> "Blanked by such love, I stood as in a drowse,
> And the slow moon edged from the upland nigh,
> My sad thoughts moving thuswise: "I may house
>
> And I may husband her, yet what am I
> But licensed tyrant to this bonded pair?
> Says Charity, Do as ye would be done by." . . .
> (p. 21)

The husband recognizes the futility of attempting to come between the honest passion of his wife and her lover. He decides to help them pack their belongings, bids them farewell, and watches them pass out of his life forever. As they leave him, he reflects:

> "'Fool,' some will say," I thought.--"But who is wise,
> Save God alone, to weigh my reasons why?"
> --"Hast thou struck home?" came with the boughs'
> night-sighs. (p. 22)
>
> It was my friend. "I have struck well. They fly,
> But carry wounds that none can cicatrize."
> --"Not mortal?" said he. "Lingering--worse," said I.
> (p. 22)

The husband feels certain he will gain his revenge through the guilty consciences of the two runaways. The torment of such guilt is worse than any mortal wound.

Hardy wrote many beautiful lyrics on the subject of lost love. These lyrics generally have one of two main themes. Either they deal with a present time or place that cannot be fully enjoyed because of memories of a lost beloved, or they are poems of guilt and regret at not having taken full advantage of one's happiness in a loved one when

one had the opportunity. Occasionally, the two thematic strands are interwoven to produce a very poignant lyric.

"Something Tapped" is an appropriate introduction to a discussion of lost love in Hardy's verse because it strongly evokes the futile desires of the poet to be re-united with his beloved from whom he has been separated by death but with whom he still dwells in his memory. The poem can be seen as the product of an overflow of powerful imaginative brooding on the past. The time of day is the gloom of evening when the poet hears something tap on his window pane. Looking toward the window and seeing his "weary Belovéd's face," he imagines he hears:

> "O I am tired of waiting," she said,
> "Night, morn, noon, afternoon;
> So cold it is in my lonely bed,
> And I thought you would join me soon!" (p. 436)

When he rises to go to the window, however, he finds that

> Only a pallid moth, alas,
> Tapped at the pane for me. (p. 436)

The reader of this poem can hardly help feeling the same letdown that the poet feels when he finds his expectations to have been the product of his imagination. Hardy also successfully evokes the mystical sensation that perhaps the pale beating moth is more than what it outwardly appears to be. Might not the lonely dead one be embodied in the

insignificant moth? The poem can be read on the literal level as well as on the mystical level.

Grief at the loss of the beloved is expressed very simply in the two poems, "Why Did I Sketch," and "It Never Looks Like Summer." In both of these poems, a present scene is marred by the memories of the dead one which it evokes in the poet's memory. In "Why Did I Sketch" the poet laments his having sketched in his loved one in a picture he drew of "an upland green,"

> For now that one has ceased to be seen
> The picture waxes akin
> To a wordless irony. (p. 447)

He cautions the reader who might "go drawing on down or cliff" not to let the "soft curves" of a "woman's silhouette" intrude in his picture. Rather:

> . . . show the escarpments stark and stiff
> As in utter solitude;
> So shall you half forget. (p. 448)

The poet declares that he would sooner die than ever again to make the "thoughtless" mistake of painting in "for love" one "who may/ Be called hence in my time." In his grief, the poet implies that "solitude" is the true condition of a man's life, and the wise man remembers this and controls his emotions.

"It Never Looks Like Summer" expresses the same sense

of grief, but without the violent denial of past bliss. The poem consists of two stanzas, the first concerned with the past when the loved one lived and the second with a present that is bleak because she is gone. The loved one said while alive that

> "It never looks like summer here
> On Beeny by the sea." (p. 477)

The poet says, "Summer it seemed to me" while she was near. In the second stanza, now that the beloved is dead, he agrees with her past words:

> It never looks like summer now
> Whatever weather's there;
> But ah, it cannot anyhow,
> On Beeny or elsewhere! (p. 477)

The state of the poet, who could not see the "drear" look of Beeny seen by his beloved while she lived, but who sees everything as drear once she is dead, is ironic. Memory has tarnished present vision.

The note of hopelessness which closes "It Never Looks Like Summer" is expressed again in "She Opened the Door." Here, however, the hopelessness is temporal rather than spatial. It centers on the bleakness of time after the death of the loved one rather than on the dreariness of places. In all four stanzas of the poem, the loved one is said to have opened new vistas to the poet. In the first

stanza he says, "She opened the door of the West to me"; in the second, "She opened the door of Romance to me"; and in the third, "She opened the door of a Love to me." The final stanza gives expression to the poet's temporal hopelessness and sorrow:

> She opens the door of the Past to me,
> Its magic lights,
> Its heavenly heights,
> When forward little is to see! (p. 740)

Once again the Past raises its head to mar all hope for joy in the future.

It is perhaps a not unjustified observation that Hardy often appears to be indulging in grief as a source of pleasure. It is easier to lament the past than to face a future that is irreparably gone. The poet himself provides an indirect defense of his grief over his memories of a lost loved one in the poem, "Unknowing," which describes the happy days of love when both he and his beloved were in health and death seemed an impossibility. When death is obviously approaching for the loved one, the two lovers still could not believe that death would mean total separation. Death has come, however, and the loved one is gone. The poet says in the concluding lines of the poem:

> . . . "Why thus inanely
> Brood on her memory so!"
> I say it vainly--
> I feel and know! (p. 52)

The poet cannot escape his feelings and the knowledge they bring. His brooding may be foolish, but such foolishness is unavoidable while memory is active.

"The Walk" is a short poem dealing with a loved one who was not fully appreciated when alive. The poet often made the walk "to the hill-top tree" alone because the loved one was too "weak and lame" to make the climb. He says of this, "I did not mind,/ Not thinking of you as left behind." Now when the beloved is dead the poet still makes the same walk:

> By myself again:
> What difference, then?
> Only that underlying sense
> Of the look of a room on returning thence. (p. 320)

The pervading sense of change wrought by time that memory so diligently keeps alive makes the walk, although outwardly unchanged in circumstances, somehow different. The grief in this poem is muted and controlled but still present.

Hardy treats the same theme of an external scene that would appear to be unchanged but for the careful eye of memory more directly in "An Anniversary" than in "The Walk." The first stanza describes in an almost prosaic manner a specific scene on a specific day of the year and at a specific time of day. The second stanza returns to the same scene on the same day of the year and at the same time

of the day. However, it is many years after the day recounted in the first stanza, and memory notes in comparing the past with the present that:

> . . . the tree that neighbours the track,
> And stoops like a pedlar afflicted with lameness,
> Knew of no sogged wound or wind-crack.
> And the joints of that wall were not enshrouded
> With mosses of many tones,
> And the garth up afar was not overcrowded
> With a multitude of white stones,
> And the man's eyes then were not so sunk that you saw
> the socket-bones. (p. 442)

Through objective description Hardy manages to convey a sense of the changes wrought by time's inevitable passage and reveals his own vivid consciousness of these changes.

The urgent desire to recapture a loved one from the past is vividly conveyed in "The Voice." The poet seems to want to transcend the boundaries built up over time and know once more, as he did when young, the dead beloved whose voice haunts his memory. He says in the first line of the poem, "Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me," and then questions what he hears when he asks in the third stanza, "Or is it only the breeze?" In the last lines of the poem, the poet presents an objective picture of his desperate state:

> Thus I; faltering forward,
> Leaves around me falling,
> Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
> And the woman calling. (p. 326)

The poet's grasping after an irrecoverable past is portrayed in an almost pathetic light. He falters forward into the future questioning whether the voice he hears is his beloved's or the wind, whether his imagination is deceiving him or whether he hears truly. He lives in a painful state of vacillation between doubt and certainty caused by the memory of the past.

In "The Phantom," the haunting power of memory expresses itself visually rather than orally as in "The Voice." The poet says of his dead beloved, "Now, as then, I see her." This image goes wherever he goes and stays with him always. It is beyond the destructive force of time because it is a product of his imagination. He says:

> Change dissolves the landscapes,
> She abides with me. (p. 210)

Faith in the image of memory is expressed at the poem's conclusion. Because the poet does not deny the image he sees, it has a gentling influence upon him:

> Shape so sweet and shy, Dear,
> Who can say thee nay?
> Never once do I, Dear,
> Wish thy ghost away. (p. 210)

Memories of the past need not disrupt the present. "The Phantom" clearly shows that they can have a saving influence if accepted with the recognition that they are but ghosts and

not reality.

Acceptance of the "phantom figure" of the dead loved one is again expressed in "At Castle Boterel." This acceptance is here accompanied by a note of quiet resignation. Revisiting a scene he had visited in the past with his beloved, the poet imaginatively relives his former visit and says:

> 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, . . .
> (p. 331)

The poet sees his one visit with the woman he loved as the one real story the slope has to tell the ages. That past visit shall remain imprinted in the "Primaeval rocks" that "form the road's steep border" even after the poet, who preserves that visit in his memory, has died. The end of the poem expresses resignation in the face of approaching death. The resignation is made easier by the faith that the fact that "we two passed" is recorded forever by the rocks. The poet says as he leaves the hill never to return again:

> I look and 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. (p. 331)

The images preserved by a man's memory die when he dies. Alive

when he lived, they face the same end as the mortal who harbors them. The understanding that phantoms from the past are as mortal as the man who envisions them prevents these phantoms from destroying all chances for present contentment and may even enable them to enrich the present. Memory is organic, and its creations are subject, like all things organic, to the eternal flux of time.

"Reminiscences of a Dancing Man" reveals the memory of a man as he recalls an old dancing hall he used to frequent often in his youth. Thinking of the hall itself brings back with it the old tunes that once echoed from its walls as well as the girls who used to dance to these tunes. Each of the three stanzas of the poem begins with a rhetorical question asking, "Who now remembers?" The narrator does not expect an answer to his questions. The past which he recalls is gone as are those who shared that past with him. Where these girls from the past are now is the question with which the narrator concludes his reminiscences:

> Is Death the partner who doth moue
> Their wormy chaps and bare?
> Do their spectres spin like sparks within
> The smoky halls of the Prince of Sin
> To a thunderous Jullien air? (p. 202)

Such questions can never be answered, but the reflective memory raises them irresistibly to the mind.

The questions of reminiscence are raised again in "In a Former Resort After Many Years." In this poem, the narrator views some people, elderly like himself, in a resort he had stayed at many years before. He asks himself whether he knows these he observes:

> Whose substance, one time fresh and furrowless,
> Is now a rag drawn over a skeleton,
> As in El Greco's canvases?-- (p. 666)

Continuing in the same train of thought, the narrator refers to the changes that time and the experiences of life have accomplished in him. He asks:

> Do they know me, whose former mind
> Was like an open plain where no foot falls,
> But now is as a gallery portrait-lined,
> And scored with necrologic scrawls,
> Where feeble voices rise, once full-defined,
> From underground in curious calls? (p. 666)

The past and the company of the past have printed themselves indelibly on the mind of the narrator. Kept alive through memory, the past is a part of the present, serving as a milestone which indicates how long a road has been traveled. As the miles accumulate, the traveler knows his journey will not last much longer.

The end of life's journey is nearing in "Song to an Old Burden," where the narrator again reminisces over a past and a company that are now gone. Each of the first three stanzas of the poem records a part of the vanished

past. In the first:

> The feet have left the wormholed flooring,
> That danced to the ancient air, . . . (p. 799)

The narrator says in the second stanza:

> The voice is heard in the room no longer
> That trilled, none sweetlier, . . . (p. 799)

And in the third stanza:

> The eyes that beamed out rapid brightness
> Have longtime found their close, . . . (p. 799)

After recording all that is gone which can never be known again, presumably because of advanced age and approaching death, the narrator asks in a tone of defiant regret:

> O what's to me this tedious Maying,
> What's to me this June?
> O why should viols be playing
> To catch and reel and rigadoon?
> Shall I sing, dance around around around,
> When phantoms call the tune! (p. 799)

The phantoms serve as a reminder of the encroachment of time which erases from the earth all the men and women we have loved and which will eventually erase us. Life becomes a fast and furious dance with little lasting meaning. The narrator sees it, to use the words of Macbeth, as "a tale told by an idiot/ Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Memory forces this awareness upon him.

The consciousness that all we love is gone and that we ourselves will some day also be gone may make death seem

desirable. A man may not want to live a life which appears meaningless. The man who converses with the poet concerning a past experience in the poem "Jubilate" is certainly desirous of death. His monologue takes place in a setting he had been at before when, he says, "I saw much less of the quick than I saw of the dead." The time of the day was early morning and the event occurred in the "hazy mazy moonlight." The narrator observed "a great company/ Of the dead minueting in stately step underground." The dead were dancing joyously and shouted gleefully, "We are out of it all!--yea, in Little-Ease cramped no more!" The narrator, dazed by what he had observed, says of the happy dead that "they had no heed of me." He tells the poet who has been listening to the retelling of this past occurrence, that "I doubted not that it warned I should soon have my call./ But--" . . . In the "but" that is left hanging in the air, disappointed hope resounds. Carrying the image of the blissful dead around with him, the narrator, who remains unknown to the poet and to the reader, longs for death. The poet says of the stranger, after telling of his vision:

> . . . in the ashes he emptied the dregs of his cup,
> And onward he went, and the darkness swallowed him up.
> (p. 480)

The strange wanderer is living only in name. The dregs of

his life have been emptied in the ashes that are the final end of all life, and he walks in darkness until he shall dance with the dead.

A sense of growing bewilderment that comes with experience and knowledge is the core of "I Was the Midmost." The poem is three stanzas in length, and each stanza recounts a step in the gradual ascent to a broader knowledge of life and the bewilderment that such knowledge may bring. In the egoism of youth, the poet declares, "I was the midmost of my world." With age, the poet falls in love with a girl and says, "She was the midmost of my world." Time took this anchoring point away from him as it had his early egoism, and the poet reaches a stage where he can say:

> Where now is midmost in my world?
> I trace it not at all:
> No midmost shows it here, or there,
> When wistful voices call
> "We are fain! We are fain!" from everywhere
> On Earth's bewildering ball! (p. 630)

Memory that preserves the knowledge of the past has made it difficult for the poet to find a central basis for his life. Experience has broadened the vista of existence and prevents the reflective man from reaching any facile solution to the riddle of life on earth.

Bewilderment is the thematic axis of "The Dream Is--Which?" but it works in this poem in a different way from

that in "I Was the Midmost." The poem, like the latter poem, is three stanzas in length. Each stanza illustrates a specific scene with the beloved observed by the poet in two different lights. The first lines of the stanzas show the lovers in the fulness of a fresh and happy youth, while the last lines show them in the haggardness of old age or death. The poet's awareness of inevitable ageing and death intrudes, spoiling the enjoyment of youthful bliss. Knowledge, as in "I Was the Midmost," makes the enjoyment of life more difficult rather than easier. Which is the truth, life or death, or are both life and death aspects of a greater truth which can never be spoken? Although these questions are never explicitly raised by the poet, they are evoked by the human situations he presents. The reader is made aware of the existence of such questions and compelled to grapple with them.

Hardy makes one of his few personal statements of a desire for death in "The Prospect." The poem is set in December, but the first stanza finds the poet reflecting upon the summertime:

> The twigs of the birch imprint the December sky
> Like branching veins upon a thin old hand;
> I think of summer-time, yes, of last July,
> When she was beneath them, greeting a gathered band
> Of the urban and bland. (p. 737)

After reminiscing about the summer, the poet returns to the winter scene. He observes the life that goes on about him, the "skaters" and the "merry boys," but with the thought that his summer-time and the woman he loved are gone forever. This thought prevents him from sharing in the activities taking place even in a cold and bare December. He says in resignation:

> But well, well do I know
> Whither I would go! (p. 737)

Life continues as the aged man broods on memories of the past.

An interesting variation of Hardy's concern with the power of memory and the phantoms it creates is illustrated in "The Shadow On the Stone." In this poem, the poet accepts what he knows is only a dream as a reality. The illusion soothes the old "lack" he feels since the death of his beloved girl. As he passes by "the Druid stone," the poet sees that the tree nearby casts "shifting shadows" upon it. He says that these shadows

> . . . shaped in my imagining
> To the shade that a well-known head and shoulders
> Threw there when she was gardening. (p. 498)

Thinking her he "had long learned to lack" behind him, the poet states that:

. . . to keep down grief
I would not turn my head to discover
That there was nothing in my belief. (p. 498)

He willfully seeks to be deceived, since the deception will ease his sorrow. The Druid stone may be read as a symbol of the activity of the imagination, and the poet declares, "Nay, I'll not unvision/ A shape which, somehow, there may be." He keeps his "head unturned" in order not to destroy the possibility which his imagination, coupled to past memories, has opened for him. Memory, in this poem, makes life easier to endure after the past is irrevocably gone.

"Wessex Heights" is a poem of escape from all the experiences of common life and the memories that remain with a man to disturb him once these experiences have been lived through. The poet says that when he is on "some heights in Wessex," "I seem where I was before my birth, and after death may be." These heights are places of absolute innocence and freedom. Upon them, a man can forget for a moment his mortal condition. "In the lowlands" the poet declares that he feels alienated from his fellow men. The heights are desirable because "mind-chains do not clank where one's next neighbour is the sky" (p. 300). He says that "In the towns I am tracked by phantoms," and that these phantoms make him false to his "simple self that was,/ And

is not now." The "great grey Plain" harbors a "figure against the moon" that makes the poet's "breast beat out of tune," and forces him to declare that he cannot go there. The "tall-spired town" is barred to him by the forms from the past that his vision still retains. There are ghosts present at "Yell'ham Bottom," "Froom-side Vale," and "in the railway train," and the poet wishes to avoid these troubling images of the past. The thought of "one rare fair woman" he also wishes to let go. His "love for her in its fulness she herself even did not know," but "time cures hearts of tenderness," and he wants now to leave her behind. The poet states in summation:

> So I am found on Ingpen Beacon, or on Wylls-Neck to the west,
> Or else on homely Bulbarrow, or little Pilsdon Crest,
> Where men have never cared to haunt, nor women have walked with me,
> And ghosts then keep their distance; and I know some liberty. (p. 301)

The poet sheds all memories of the past and is, in a sense, born anew on these Wessex heights. Here he can deny memory and the experiences that have made him what he is. The poem vividly demonstrates the haunting power of memory to disturb any calm a man may find in life.

By enabling a man to recall the bliss of an irrecoverable past, memory can mar all chances of present

contentment. It gives forceful testimony to the passage of time. However, memory can also serve a positive function. The images from the past, when recognized and accepted as images, may make the present more endurable. Memory can provide life with a sense of unity that makes it, in turn, more meaningful to a man. It has a tragic function, but there is another side to the tragic face. By dwelling on this positive side where life is viewed as a unity, Hardy could escape the fearful phantoms of the past. Salvation from the tormenting changes of organic existence is available through the transcendent powers of an active organic memory. Life provides its own means to health.

CHAPTER III

THE UNITY OF LIFE

The wind blew words along the skies,
And these it blew to me
Through the wide dusk; "Lift up your eyes,
Behold this troubled tree,
Complaining as it sways and plies;
It is a limb of thee.

--"The Wind Blew Words," p. 419.

A new world opens to Hardy when he begins to expand his vision to include not only the lives of men but the life of all living things around him. Knowledge is gained from the contrasts and comparisons that can be made between man and the so-called lower forms of life. This knowledge brings a strong and soothing influence with it. Relationships that can be seen among all living things provide a new conception of life, one that is broader in scope, and deeper in insight with the power to infuse life with new significance. Once the poet grasps the common life that is shared by all living things, he leaves the tragic vision behind.

In "An August Midnight," the poet is sitting at his desk when "A longlegs, a moth, and a dumbledore" along with

"A sleepy fly" enter the room to join his presence. He says concerning his four visitors, and himself:

> Thus meet we five, in this still place,
> At this point of time, at this point in space.
> --My guests besmear my new-penned line,
> Or bang at the lamp and fall supine.
> "God's humblest, they!" I muse. Yet why?
> They know Earth-secrets that know not I. (p. 134)

The poet questions the traditional notion that casually places these insects on a humble rung of existence much below man. The grounds for his questioning lie in the fact that these nondescript creatures are aware of things about the earth of which he, as a man, can have no awareness. What their secret knowledge is he cannot specify, but a new world is opened in the belief that there are facts about life which are beyond man's ability to know. This new realm, possessed by these fellow living creatures, may yet hold the grace whereby a man can save himself from the torments of a temporal human existence.

"The Master and the Leaves" is a dialogue between the leaves of a tree in a man's yard and the man himself. The leaves are pictured at three different seasons in their life-cycle, spring, summer and autumn. They explain the changes they are going through to the Master and complain that he does not lift his head to observe these changes. Life goes on above him while he takes no notice of it.

Finally, the Master says in response to the leaves:

> --"I mark your early going,
> And that you'll soon be clay,
> I have seen your summer showing
> As in my youthful day;
> But why I seem unknowing
> Is too sunk in to say!" (p. 621)

The Master appears to be caught up in his own thought processes, and these make him seem "unknowing" of the life cycle acted out above his head. The leaves seem to believe that there is an urgent message to be gained from the changes they endure. The man on the ground, however, is numb to this message for reasons "too sunk in to say." The implication is that there is something inherent in his being a man which keeps him locked out of the knowledge the leaves have to impart. We as men cannot ourselves say what this knowledge may be, but it is there, and a man, by implication, would benefit if he possessed it. A larger vision is available to the earth-bound if he strives for it.

Just as those forms of life separate from a man can reveal a wider scope of life to him, so also may love reveal a world that stretches beyond that seen by man's common vision. In the poem, "Beyond the Last Lamp," Hardy vividly evokes the world that love reveals to one. The poet reminisces about two lovers, "Walking slowly, whispering sadly,"

whom he passed thirty years earlier "Beyond the last lone lamp." It was a rainy night, and the two seemed to blend harmoniously with the gloom of their environment. Although the "olden look" of the place may "linger on," the couple themselves "have gone." The poet says in meditation:

> Whither? Who knows, indeed. . . . And yet
> To me, when nights are weird and wet,
> Without those comrades there at tryst
> Creeping slowly, creeping sadly,
> That one lane does not exist.
> There they seem brooding on their pain,
> And will, while such a lane remain. (p. 297)

The sadness of the two lovers has been captured by the light of the "last lone lamp" and remains as a part of the imperishable history of that lane as long as the lane itself remains. There is an indestructible truth to the grief that slowed the lovers' step. It may be invisible to the eyes of most men, but to the poet who observes, it is the one reality of the spot. There is more to life than that which readily meets the eye.

The same sense of an imperishable truth that pervades "Beyond the Last Lamp" is found in the short poem, "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations.'" Three different scenes are briefly depicted, and the claim is made that these scenes will endure "Though Dynasties pass" and after "war's annals" "fade into night." The first picture is a lethargic one of

"a man harrowing clods" together "With an old horse." The second scene is that of a "thin smoke without flame" that rises "From the heaps of couch-grass," and the third is that of "a maid and her wight" who "Come whispering by." There is in all three of these pictures of rural life a substance more fundamentally real than in all the games of international statesmanship and rivalry. It is this which makes them more enduring. The poet never explicitly indicates the quality that makes these simple scenes so lasting, but the reader recognizes the truth in what he says. The human spirit responds naturally and spontaneously to some aspect of the man plowing his field and the two whispering lovers which the show of international policy does not evoke. What the truth of these scenes is perhaps cannot be uttered. It is a matter of intuitive recognition.

A direct statement of the truth that the "dream" of love reveals is made in "The Curtains Now Are Drawn." The inevitable death of all living things would make the poet reiterate the "texts that 'Life is vain'" which are made by the grasses that cover the graves of the dead. He is prevented from making such a reiteration, however, by the recollection of a song his lover sang to him while she lived:

> "O the dream that thou art my Love, be it thine,
> And the dream that I am thy Love, be it mine,
> And death may come, but loving is divine." (p. 540)

The "loving" that is "divine" transcends death and reveals a truth which is greater than the texts of the graveyard grasses. Through love a man goes beyond the tragic view of life to a more fundamental, if unutterable, reality. In its universality, its availability to all men, love enforces the divine origin of this reality. Man can be saved from the general onslaught of time.

Through its power to reveal a deeper reality to a man than that which he ordinarily perceives, love is an instructive force. So also do the lives of the humbler animals that exist on the earth with man hold lessons for him that may help him into new perceptions. The short poem, "The Reminder," reminds us that all living creatures are connected with each other. The poet is sitting in a room warmed by a fire on Christmas day when he chances to look at "the frosty scene outside." There he views a famished thrush toiling "to reach a rotting berry," and he says in despair:

> Why, O starving bird, when I
> One day's joy would justify,
> And put misery out of view,
> Do you make me notice you! (p. 252)

The poet cannot ignore the plight of the bird. In a sense,

it is his plight also, and viewing it spoils his contentment. He cannot justify indifference to the condition of the humble creature. All life is interrelated, and the poet shares the bird's misery.

Relationships between the lives of the birds and the life of a man are drawn again in "After the Club Dance." A young girl is walking home from a dance in the early morning. The mountains that rise above her in the distance seem to cast scornful glances upon her. The girl feels guilty for having had sexual intercourse with "that young man o' mine," or at least we are led to assume that this is the cause of the shame she is feeling. She questions herself:

> Why do I sink with shame
> When the birds a-perch there eye me?
> They, too, have done the same! (p. 224)

Her act is justified by nature, and there is no natural reason to feel shame for what she has done. The poem depicts a struggle within the girl's breast between the moral instruction of religion and society, and natural physical promptings. She attempts to justify her deed by her reference to the birds. Whether she does so or not is not relevant to the poem. However, if she could accept the lessons the birds have to teach her, she would free herself from the shame that torments her. A man may learn from his

humbler fellow creatures.

"Wagtail and Baby" is another poem which strongly implies that there are lessons to be learned by a man from the animal kingdom. The poem depicts a baby watching a ford to which "A wagtail came for drinking." "A blaring bull," a "stallion" and "A mongrel slowly slinking" all approach to cross the ford, and the small bird maintains his ground. Then a "perfect gentleman" nears, and

> The wagtail, in a winking,
> With terror rose and disappeared;
> The baby fell a-thinking. (p. 279)

The baby is still young enough and, by implication, innocent enough to be impressed by what he has observed at the ford. Obviously, there is a lesson to be learned here which the baby, still free of social and religious propaganda, can appreciate. Man has been separated from the natural world by society. This cuts him off from a good part of life, and such alienation is unfortunate. The vision of the unity of all life and oneself as a part of that unity is a valuable one and a truer one than the conception of man that society instills in men.

Time may also be viewed as a unifying element. Life, when seen from an objective stance, begins, ends, and begins again. Although the individual life may be terminated, the

life of the whole continues. This vision is higher than the subjective tragic view. It frees a man from seeing life tragically and reveals a greater truth to him. "At Day-Close in November" depicts the outlook that transcends the tragic through the vantage point of an objective time. The poet says of the pine and beech trees that he is watching as they toss in the wind:

> I set every tree in my June time,
> And now they obscure the sky. (p. 314)

The youth who planted the young trees is now an elderly man. The advanced size of the trees he planted is an indication of the many years that have passed since his "June time." Children ramble through the trees, and the aged man says that they

> Conceive that there never has been
> A time when no tall trees grew here,
> That none will in time be seen. (p. 315)

The poet, with the knowledge gained from his many years, can see the past when "no tall trees grew" and predict the future "when none will . . . be seen." His vision surpasses that of the children and is closer to the truth of things. Age permits him to see life with greater objectivity and clarity.

Life just beginning and life recently ended are the subjects of "Life and Death At Sunrise." A man driving a

wagon is depicted driving slowly up a hill as a man on horseback rides down the slope. Upon meeting each other, the two "halt of long use" to converse. The man on the horse has news of a baby boy just borne by his wife. He tells the wagoner, "we think we shall call him 'Jack.'" He then asks the driver of the wagon, "And what have you got covered there?" The wagoner explains:

> "Oh, a coffin for old John Thinn:
> We are just going to put him in." (p. 695)

One "John" leaves the world to make way for another. The scene is set against a vividly described natural background. The poet says of the surrounding hills:

> They are like awakened sleepers on one elbow lifted,
> Who gaze around to learn if things during night have shifted. (p. 695)

The ageless hills are conscious of the life that goes on around them. The wildlife of the area is portrayed as also taking part in the drama which unfolds between the two passing men:

> While woodlarks, finches, sparrows, try to entune at one time,
> And cocks and hens and cows and bulls take up the chime. (p. 695)

All nature is united in its interest of the news of birth and death. The poem reveals both the interdependence of all life and the general life of all living things as being

a continual process of death and renewal.

"Last Look Round St. Martin's Fair" is another poem of life continuing against a natural scene which is minutely and vividly described. The time of the day is sunset, when

> The fickle unresting earth has turned to a fresh patroon--
> The cold, now brighter, moon. (p. 732)

While a new "patroon" takes over from the sun in the heavens, down on the earth

> The woman in red, at the nut-stall with the gun,
> Lights up, and still goes on: (p. 732)

The stoical endurance of the woman in the nut-stall is powerfully evoked by the contrast the poet makes between it and the changing order in the sky. The woman, whose "hands are black with loading all the day,"

> . . . treats her labour as 'twere play,
> Tosses her ear-rings, and talks ribaldry
> To the young men around as natural gaiety, . . .
> (p. 732)

This outwardly careless attitude is only superficial appearance maintained with great strength. The poet states the bleak, hidden reality at the poem's conclusion:

> And not a weary work she'd readily stay
> And never again nut-shooting see,
> Though crying, "Fire away!" (p. 732)

While she lives, the woman endures her work with fortitude.

She knows she is part of a changing order, and eventually she will work no longer. Until that time arrives, she goes on with her labor. She has accepted her earthly condition.

When time is seen as an objective whole, death is not an absolute end but only a step in the continual process of growth and decay. The nature of the individual life changes with death, but life itself goes on. The poem, "Drummer Hodge," provides a beautiful illustration of the unceasing nature of life in the universe. Hodge was a young Drummer killed in battle far away from "his Wessex home." The poet says of his death:

> They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest
> Uncoffined--just as found:
> His landmark is a kopje-crest
> That breaks the veldt around;
> And foreign constellations west
> Each night above his mound. (p. 83)

Hodge joins the earth, and life continues above him. Although the young man from Wessex was unfamiliar with the strange land to which war brought him, he has now blended with it to become an eternal part of the flux of time in the universe. As the poet tells us:

> Yet portion of that unknown plain
> Will Hodge for ever be;
> His homely Northern breast and brain
> Grow to some Southern tree,
> And strange-eyed constellations reign
> His stars eternally. (p. 83)

Hodge's life is not over. It will continue in a different form as long as the universe endures.

"Afterwards" is one of Hardy's most poignant and delicately contrived illustrations of the life that continues even after the death of the individual. In this poem, the poet is concerned with his own death, yet his tone is reflective rather than tragic. He wonders whether he will live on in the minds of men when they stop to observe the universe around them which was such a constant and close subject of his own observations. The poet first makes note of the month of May, that "flaps its glad green leaves like wings,/ Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk," and asks if, once he is dead, the neighbors will say, "He was a man who used to notice such things." He wonders if they will realize, when they observe at dusk the soundless flight of "The dewfall-hawk," that, to him, this was "a familiar sight." Perhaps,

> 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."
> (p. 521)

When "Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees," perhaps someone among those he knew when alive on earth will think, "He was one who had an eye for such mysteries." Finally,

the poet questions:

> And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard
> in the gloom,
> And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its out-
> rollings,
> Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
> "He hears it not now, but used to notice such things?"
> (p. 521)

The poem reveals the poet as a careful and sympathetic observer of nature, wondering if his neighbors will remember him as such when he is dead. If he has any immortality, it will be in the natural universe that he spent so much of his time and energy observing while alive and that will continue to exist once he is gone. The importance of the natural world to the poet is evident and in this importance there is a possibility that he will live on. In retrospect, we know that, in his poetry, he does continue to live. Salvation has been attained, although in a way that Hardy's artistic honesty never permitted him to spend much time thinking about. He was almost wholly concerned with man's existence on earth and in relation to the earth.

The poet again talks about his own death in "The Six Boards." In this poem, Hardy draws a relationship between the life of the six boards that will go to make up his coffin and his own life. He declares that "Six boards belong to me," and the declaration is made in such a way

to imply that "six boards" are all that he, or any other man, truly possesses. The poet knows nothing about the condition or the location of these boards, but he trusts that they will supply his want "When notified." He then states, completing the connection between the boards and himself:

> Those boards and I--how much
> In common we, of feel and touch
> Shall share thence on,--earth's far core-quakings,
> Hill-shocks, tide-shakings--
>
> Yea, hid where none will note,
> The once live tree and man, remote
> From mundane hurt as if on Venus, Mars,
> Or furthest stars. (p. 790)

Once a man is dead and buried the upsets of his temporal existence are escaped. The poem is significant as an indication of Hardy's ability to identify with plant life. The identification is drawn under the common terms of death, a change which all organic things must experience. The poet finds an almost ironic consolation in accepting the inevitable facts of existence.

"Rain On a Grave" is an intriguing poem which makes a softly ironic contrast between a woman as she was when alive and as she is dead. Now that the beloved woman is in her grave the clouds pour down their waters upon her with "ruthless disdain,--"

Her who but lately
  Had shivered with pain
As at touch of dishonour
If there had lit on her
So coldly, so straightly
  Such arrows of rain: (p. 321)

The fury of the natural elements cannot be escaped in the grave. The poet longs to switch places with the woman in the battered grave, or, better yet, to join her. They then would both be "Exposed to one weather." He cannot yet do so, however, and he meditates on the daisies that will soon be growing from the loved one's mound:

Till she form part of them--
Ay--the sweet heart of them,
Loved beyond measure
With a child's pleasure
  All her life's round. (p. 321)

In the flowers she loved so well while alive, the woman will be born again. The poem manifests Hardy's belief in the unity of all organic life. This life, when conceived of as a whole, lives eternally in various and changing forms. It escapes destruction.

Perhaps the clearest statement in Hardy's poetry of the unified life that transcends temporal destruction is found in the poem, "Transformations." The poem is almost a direct philosophic statement of belief, opening with the thought:

> 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 (p. 443)

The poet continues to make more of the same kind of transformations by seeing a woman "who often prayed,/ Last century, for repose" in "these grasses" and by entertaining the possibility that:

> . . . the fair girl long ago
> Whom I often tried to know
> May be entering this rose. (p. 443)

The statement of belief is summed up at the poem's end:

> 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! (p. 443)

The same energy animates all living things and prevents them from permanent death. Life is continually being resurrected to manifest itself in different forms. The tragic vision that was grounded in the inevitable fact of a death that was the end of life is here entirely transcended in the vision that sees all living things as sharing in the one universal life. This life is organic and physical rather than spiritual in nature. It reveals itself in the "sun and rain" and not in any conception of an unknowable Supreme

Being. Hardy transcends the tragic vision, but he keeps his feet firmly planted on the earth.

The unity of all mankind is suggested in the poem, "Drawing Details in An Old Church," which is reminiscent of Donne's meditation on "for whom the bell tolls." In contrast to the Donne meditation, however, Hardy's poem reveals a failure to recognize the personal concern of a bell that tolls at the death of another. The poet is sitting within a church drawing the details of its Gothic design, when he hears a tolling bell:

> I ask not whom it tolls for,
> Incurious who he be;
> So, some morrow, when those knolls for
> One unguessed, sound out for me,
> A stranger, loitering under
> In nave or choir,
> May think, too, "Whose, I wonder?"
> But not inquire. (p. 653)

The unconcern as to whose death toll is being echoed by the surrounding hills is an implied deficiency on the part of the poet and of the stranger who may listen later. This deficiency may be common and easily comprehended. Nevertheless, all men are united in a common life, and an interdependence should be acknowledged. Hardy refers to this interdependence of all men in his journal:

> Altruism, or The Golden Rule, or whatever "Love your Neighbour as Yourself" may be called, will ultimately be brought about I think by the pain

> we see in others reacting on ourselves, as if we and they were a part of one body. Mankind, in fact, may be and possibly will be viewed as members of one corporeal frame.[5]

In the knowledge and acceptance of the pain of human life lie the means to go beyond the bounds of that pain. Man is part of a larger "corporeal frame." He shares the energy that is at the basis of all creation. The individual is part of a universal and eternal organism. By recognizing the whole of which he is a small but active member, he escapes the tragic limitations of his personal mortality.

Hardy finds the means to salvation within the confines of an earthly-oriented thought. His vision remains organic and does not depend on heavenly justification. Through love, by experiencing the pain of human life and learning from it, and by observing all life that goes on around him a man can define for himself a path to grace.

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[5]Hardy, The Early Life, p. 294.

CHAPTER IV

THE ANIMATE FANTASTICAL

> I have lived with Shades so long,
> And talked to them so oft,
> Since forth from cot and croft
> I went mankind among, . . .
>
> --"I Have Lived With Shades," p. 169.

Through the power of memory and with the view of the universe as an eternal and universal organism, Hardy has the grounds for the animate fantastical world that he creates in many of his poems. This world is fantastic in that it is composed of ghosts, phantoms, and other spectral creatures. It is animate, because to the poet, these creatures exist in the physical world. Their presence haunts that world. Hardy could even reach a state in which he conceived of himself as a spectre. A note from his journal makes this clear:

> 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."[6]

Life becomes "tolerable" by thinking of it as past, and the animate spectres which haunt Hardy's vision are physical representations of a past world. Through these he rises above a morbid pessimism. He abandons the tragic vision by the means of a way of looking at life that is mystical in nature. It is not objectively real, but has its origins in a creative imagination. Hence these spectres exist for the poet. They help him to come to terms with his life. They are not part of a system that he would establish as universally real, but organic productions of the memory and imagination of one man.

"Night-Time in Mid-Fall" and "A January Night" are two poems in which a fantastical world of spectres is clearly born. Both poems illustrate a distraught natural scene, and from this earthly upheaval spectres arise. In "Night-Time in Mid-Fall," the night is "storm-strid," and winds are "footing swift/ Through the blind profound." The poem depicts a general catastrophic scene that forebodes the imminent coming of some strange event:

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[6]Hardy, The Early Life, p. 275.

> Leaves totter down still green, and spin and drift;
> The tree-trunks rock to their roots, which wrench
> and lift
> The loam where they run onward underground.
>
> The streams are muddy and swollen; eels migrate
> To a new abode; (p. 696)

We are well prepared for the coming that is finally announced:

> The westward fronts of towers are saturate,
> Church-timbers crack, and witches ride abroad.
> (p. 696)

The witches seem to spring almost naturally from the upheaval around them, and this organic origin helps create a vivid picture of a world inhabited by these spectral creatures.

This same tempest-torn world is pictured in "A January Night," where:

> The rain smites more and more,
> The east wind snarls and sneezes; (p. 438)

The poet continues his natural description with a direct statement that some foreboding event is about to occur:

> The tip of each ivy-shoot
> Writhes on its neighbour's face;
> There is some hid dread afoot
> That we cannot trace. (p. 438)

A note of pain is introduced into the earthly upheaval. The poet goes on to conjecture as to just what may be causing the upheaval, but he does not establish his suspicions as actual fact because the true reason for such earthly torment cannot be determined.

> Is it the spirit astray
> Of the man at the house below
> Whose coffin they took in to-day?
> We do not know. (p. 438)

The possibility of a "spirit astray" definitely exists. This possibility is enough to haunt the poet's imagination. Hardy has made room in his thought for a world that is beyond human reason, and thus discovers a way out of the tragic view of life.

The birth of a "shade" in the poet's personal life is recorded in "On a Heath." The first two stanzas depict a meeting of the poet and the girl he loves on an "evening of dark weather." The weather and the time of day conspire to prevent the poet from seeing his beloved before he hears her "gown-skirt rustling" on the heath and her voice. As she draws closer, he says:

> And the town-shine in the distance
> Did but baffle here the sight,
> And then a voice flew forward:
> "Dear, is't you? I fear the night!"
> And the herons flapped to norward
> In the firs upon my right. (p. 441)

The herons that rise at the sound of the voice that fears the night are omens of some unfortunate happening in the future. The tone of mystery and calamity is established before that mystery and calamity are revealed at the poem's conclusion:

There was another looming
  Whose life we did not see;
There was one stilly blooming
  Full nigh to where walked we;
There was a shade entombing
  All that was bright of me. (p. 441)

The "shade" that was imminent on that night on the heath becomes a living embodiment of all the poet's past happiness once the loved one is gone. It is the reality he knows, and he lives with it as an actual physical presence.

The presence of the happy dead haunts the narrator in the poem, "Voices From Things Growing in a Churchyard." Six voices speak to the narrator, each in a different form. Fanny Hurd is present "In daisy shapes above my grave." Bachelor Bowring has become "a dancer in green as leaves on a wall." Thomas Voss declares that he has "entered this yew,/ And turned to clusters ruddy of view." Lady Gertrude has become the "laurel that shades your head." Eve Greensleeves is kissed now "by glowworms and by bees" as she used to be "Kissed by men." She lives on to enjoy her old fun in changed form. Old Squire Audeley Grey has "clambered up anew/ As ivy-green." All six of these persons from the past continue to live for the narrator. He hears them speaking:

All day cheerily,
All night eerily! (p. 591)

This poem presents again a past that is not dead but embodied in forms alive in the present.

The voices of the dead speak again in the poem, "A Night of Questionings." The narrator hears their voices in the night wind as they question him as to how the world fares since their death. He can only answer the five groups who question him that the world remains nearly the same. The lot of mankind certainly has not improved. Men are born and die as always. In death, all men become equal. While on earth, they wander about, indulge "In periodic spasms" of war, and reveal false and unlovely deeds just as they have always done. The poem is a reflection on the fundamentally unchanging course of man's life on earth. The medium for this reflection is the voices from the past with which the narrator can commune.

The dead who have changed "Unsuccess to success" by dying speak to the poet in "Friends Beyond." The voices in this poem are identified as specific individuals from the poet's past. He says of these local dead, "They've a way of whispering to me--fellow-wight who yet abide." The dead consider their death a triumph and willingly bequeath all the goods they cherished so greatly when alive to the poet or to others they knew to do with as they please. They

have no need of the vanities of earthly life in the grave. They are "with very gods' composure, freed those crosses late and soon." In this poem, the poet reflects upon the desirability of death through the animate dead.

The dead also come alive in "Channel Firing," which presents an imaginary dialogue between God and the dead lying in their coffins. The "great guns" of war have awakened them from their sleep. They say of the gun fire, "We thought it was the Judgment-day/ And sat upright." God, however, informs the awakened dead of the true state of affairs:

> It's gunnery practice out at sea
> Just as before you went below;
> The world is as it used to be: (p. 287)

God says that "It will be warmer when/ I blow the trumpet," and then He raises the possibility that He might not ever blow the trumpet. He says to the alert dead, "you are men,/ And rest eternal sorely need." The dead, reassured, lie down again and wonder if the world will "ever saner be." The poem implies that it will not. It concludes with an image of the guns

> Roaring their readiness to avenge,
> As far inland as Stourton Tower,
> And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge. (p. 288)

The three monuments of the past evoke a sense of the length

of time that men have been fighting wars and will probably continue doing so. Through an imaginary dialogue where the dead come to life for a moment the poet makes a comment on man's unchanging nature.

One of Hardy's most powerful poems in which the dead are brought vividly back to life is "The Souls of the Slain." The poet is beside the sea when, he says:

> . . . with darkness and silence the spirit was on me
> To brood and be still. (p. 84)

The night is without wind when a strange sound is suddenly heard:

> Soon from out of the Southward seemed nearing
> A whirr, as of wings
> Waved by mighty-vanned flies,
> Or by night-moths of measureless size,
> And in softness and smoothness well-nigh beyond hearing
> Of corporal things. (p. 84)

The strange "whirr is that of:

> A dim-discerned train
> Of sprites without mould, (p. 85)

The sprites become vocal and reveal themselves to the poet's imaginative ear as the souls of those killed in war "On the earth's nether bord/ Under Capricorn." A dialogue develops between these "sprites" from the south and their leader, "A senior soul-flame," who arrives from the north. These dead souls have returned home to "feast" on their fame. They are informed by their captain, who has been home before them,

that their kin and loved ones who survive them:

> . . . linger less
> On your glory and war-mightiness
> Than on dearer things."-- (p. 85)

The mothers, fathers, sweethearts, and wives whom the war dead have left behind all remember them, if they remember them at all, less for their deeds of heroism than for personal memories that lie closer to home. Some of the sprites are embittered by this knowledge, but others are encouraged by it and declare:

> "Fame we prized till to-day;
> Yet that hearts keep us green for old kindness we prize now
> A thousand times more!" (p. 86)

The "apparitions" then leave their place of meeting. Some "Bore to northward for home" while "those of bitter traditions" plunged into the "fathomless regions" of the sea. The poet is once more alone in the "gloaming" listening to the "Sea-mutterings." The poem is clearly imaginative, but it illustrates Hardy's brooding memory on the past, on the tragedy of mankind and the imagination that could use memory and the tragic vision to create fictions that ease a reflective poet's pain.

An interesting variation on the theme of the past made animate is presented in the poem, "Haunting Fingers," subtitled "A Phantasy in a Museum of Musical Instruments."

The instruments, conversing among themselves, are filled with regret for a past when they were used to make memorable music. The viol says to his "Comrades":

> "Well 'twere if all of our glossy gluey make
> Lay in the damp without, and fell to fragments quite!"
> (p. 559)

The viol's thought is echoed by another of the speaking instruments, and revivified memories of the past begin to circulate throughout the museum:

> And they felt past handlers clutch them,
> Though none was in the room,
> Old players' dead fingers touch them,
> Shrunk in the tomb. (p. 559)

A cello, a harpsichord, a drum, an "aged viol," a shawm, and a "sick lyre" all nostalgically relive their beloved and melodious pasts. The instruments, while they knew such joy, never realized that they would conclude their histories preserved in a museum. They are saddened and disillusioned. As the day slowly arrives the instruments gradually grow silent once more. The poem is obviously an allegory on the state of man on earth who grows old to regret his youthful and blissful past. It is another illustration of Hardy's use of the imagination in confronting that past. In this instance, however, the final note is one of resignation. The tragedy that is man's lot on earth is not transcended but accepted.

"Night in the Old Home" reveals the poet in his old age reflecting on his life in a home long inhabited by his family. The ancestors that are dead come back to converse with him. The first stanza presents the scene:

> When the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
> And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,
> And from hall and parlour the living have gone to
> their rest,
> My perished people who housed them here come back to me.
> (p. 253)

The dead ancestors sit down in the places where they sat while alive and cast occasional glances of "wistfulness" upon the poet. There is "A strange upbraiding smile upon all their faces," and a "passive tristfulness" is in their bearing. The poet asks his resurrected ancestors:

> "Do you uphold me, lingering and languishing here,
> A pale late plant of your once strong stock?" I
> say to them;
> "A thinker of crooked thoughts upon Life in the sere,
> And on That which consigns men to night after showing
> the day to them?" (p. 253)

There is a self-accusing note in the question which the poet asks his ancestors. He calls his thoughts "crooked" and refers to himself as "A pale late plant." The response of the ancestors bears a slight tone of reproach. They give their living descendant advice on how he should live his life:

> Take of Life what it grants, without question!" they
> answer me seemingly.
> "Enjoy, suffer, wait: spread the table here freely
> like us,

> And, satisfied, placid, unfretting, watch Time
> away beamingly!" (p. 253)

The mild reprimand which the poet imagines his ancestors make him indicates his ability to look critically and unfavorably upon his life and thought. At the same time, however, he indirectly criticizes his ancestors by placing in their mouths the words that he does. The implication is made that it is insufficient to "watch Time away beamingly!" Those who can do so are complacent and unaware of the full nature of man's life on earth. In this poem, Hardy again deals with the past by resurrecting the dead and imbuing them with the life they once knew.

Hardy's life becomes less of a burden by the power of his imagination to create phantoms to clarify or order the questions, problems, and longings raised by life. In this way, he escapes the tendency to wallow in an unproductive pessimism before the tragic face of existence. Although the imagination may not always enable him to celebrate his knowledge of life, he still can accept the tragedy positively and use it creatively. In a few of his poems, however, he expresses an almost mystical attitude in which a buoyant and sometimes joyful affirmation is present. These few poems shall be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE VISIONARY REALM

> I idly cut a parsley stalk,
> And blew therein towards the moon; . . .
>
> --"On a Midsummer Eve," p. 415.

In the poem, "On a Midsummer Eve," from which the epigraph to this chapter is taken, the poet evokes the imagination and its power to revive the dead past. The ghosts that are aroused by the tune blown towards the moon are animate images of that past and typical of the phantoms and spectres that were discussed in the previous chapter. Along with these ghosts a "faint figure" "with the bygone look" is summoned. This figure is evidently a past love of the poet's. Hardy goes a step further in the imaginative process in this poem, however, than he does in any of the poems covered previously to this. He says:

> I lipped rough rhymes of chance, not choice,
> I thought not what my words might be;
> There came into my ear a voice
> That turned a tenderer verse for me. (p. 416)

By chance a "tenderer verse" is born before which the haunting and painful images of the past fade away, losing their

ability to distress. This "tenderer verse" is the subject of this last chapter. Hardy noted in his journal, "I want to see the deeper reality underlying the scenic, the expression of what are sometimes called abstract imaginings."[7] The number of poems in which Hardy writes from the state of this "deeper reality" is small, but they reveal a depth of insight in which the tragedy inherent in temporal mortal existence is totally transcended, primarily because the poet, through what is almost mystical perception, escapes his temporal nature. Hardy also stated in his journal, "The poet takes note of nothing that he cannot feel emotively."[8] These few poems, written when the poet had his feet solidly implanted in and his eyes steadily set on the "deeper reality," are emotive in nature. They may be discussed rationally, but the comprehension of them requires more than the use of the rational faculties.

The eternity that can be known through love is the subject of "Under the Waterfall." The poem is a dialogue between two unidentified speakers, one of whom is a woman

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[7]Hardy, The Early Life, p. 242.

[8]Hardy, The Later Years, p. 133.

who explains to her listener that plunging her bared arm into a basin of water brings back "The sweet sharp sense of a fugitive day." The recollection of this "fugitive day" brings with it:

> . . . the only prime
> And real love-rhyme
> That I know by heart,
> And that leaves no smart, . . . (pp. 315-316)

This painless rhyme of love is the "purl of a little valley fall":

> . . . that never ceases
> In stir of kingdoms, in wars, in peaces;
> With a hollow boiling voice it speaks
> And has spoken since hills were turfless peaks."
> (p. 316)

The purl of the small waterfall is endowed with a quality of timelessness. When the listener asks why recollection of a valley fall should bring a rhyme of love to the woman's mind, she relates the story of a distant day in August when she and her lover enjoyed a picnic beside the fall. She accidentally dropped a drinking cup into the fall. She and her lover searched for the cup with bared arms, but they could not find it, and "There the glass still is."

> "By night, by day, when it shines or lours,
> There lies intact that chalice of ours,
> And its presence adds to the rhyme of love
> Persistently sung by the fall above.
> No lip has touched it since his and mine
> In turns therefrom sipped lovers' wine." (p. 317)

The cup that lies in the pool formed by the running waters of the ageless fall symbolizes the eternal nature of the love known by the two who dined beside that fall. It is now part of an eternity that carries no pain with it, and there is no tragedy in the recollection of this past event.

"A Kiss" is an even clearer illustration of the eternal nature of love because there is no use of a concrete object such as a cup and a waterfall to symbolize this eternity. Two lovers in the distant past kissed "By a wall the stranger now calls his." The poet declares his faith in the eternity of that kiss:

> It cannot have died; that know we well.
> Somewhere it pursues its flight,
> One of a long procession of sounds
> Travelling aethereal rounds
> Far from earth's bounds
> In the infinite. (p. 438)

This "particular kiss" lives on in ethereal realms. It is part "of a long procession of sounds" that form the abstract imaginings with which Hardy is dealing. In these imaginings, a new faith is found providing the strength for affirmation.

In "A Night in November" a whole new world is evoked, similar in nature to that suggested by "A Kiss." The poem leaves one with a sense of mystery because this new world is merely hinted at and not clearly defined. The poet pictures himself lying in bed "half-awake" on a windy night

in autumn. The wind blows dead leaves into the room and the poet hears a tree declaring "to the gloom/ Its sorrow that they were shed." The poem is clearly imaginative in nature, since no tree can actually declare its sorrow. The poet only has the subjective impression that this is what he hears. Hardy once stated, "I hold that the mission of poetry is to record impressions, not convictions,"[9] and in this poem it is impressions which are recorded. He says in regard to the dead leaves from the sorrowful tree:

> One leaf of them touched my hand,
> And I thought that it was you
> There stood as you used to stand,
> And saying at last you knew! (p. 555)

We can conjecture that the "you" the poet addresses in the poem is a dead beloved, but it is difficult to arrive at any clear answers as to what the beloved has finally come to know. The knowledge would seem to be of something that could not be clearly expressed in life. It appears to be part of a truth that is unutterable. The fact that there are some truths which are too deeply felt and thought to be readily expressed gives the poem a poignant quality. The tragic element is transcended, however, because the truth which has remained unuttered for so long is finally

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[9]Hardy, The Later Years, p. 178.

communicated in an imaginative, almost mystical manner. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Hamlet tells his friend, "There are more things in heaven and earth Horatio/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." The knowledge that the poet finally communicates, or imagines that he communicates to his loved one, is of the same nature as the "things" of which Horatio's philosophy takes no account. In this poem, we are in a world beyond the rational and beyond tragedy.

"The Fallow Deer At the Lonely House" is another poem which vividly evokes the presence of an irrational but deeply meaningful world beyond the normal powers of man to discern. The deer is a representative from this world. Significantly, the poem does not specifically identify the creature that peers in through a "curtain-chink" at the people within who "sit and think/ By the fender-brink." The animal is identified only in the title of the poem. The people thinking inside do not notice the outside observer:

> We do not discern those eyes
> Watching in the snow;
> Lit by lamps of rosy dyes
> We do not discern those eyes
> Wondering, aglow,
> Fourfooted, tiptoe. (p. 566)

The snow and the "lamps of rosy dyes" lend an aura of mystery to the scene. The deer is a mysterious visitor, "aglow" and "tiptoe." The poem makes a subtle contrast between the

rational nature on one hand and the irrational or imaginative on the other and suggests that man's reason is not sufficient to interpret the universe.

Faith in the significance and value of the powers of the imagination is expressed in "Snow in the Suburbs." In this poem, the poet accepts all sides of his human nature and of what it means to be a man. The mystery that can never be deciphered is received as mystery. After depicting in general a still winter day when the snow is falling, Hardy focuses his vision on a sparrow that enters a tree and describes the small avalanche of snow that the bird touches off in the tree. He portrays a mute world when few creatures are astir. The scene is one of emptiness and silence and forebodes some important, if hidden, event. The concluding lines of the poem fulfill the expectation the poem has created up to this time:

> The steps are a blanched slope,
> Up which, with feeble hope,
> A black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin;
> And we take him in. (p. 697)

The black cat, symbolic of mystery and perhaps unforeseen misfortune, leaves the bleak and silent outside world and enters a human habitation upon the invitation of those who dwell therein. The poem illustrates a willingness to accept whatever life has to offer. The tragic burden has been shed,

and acceptance replaces resignation as the attitude with which mortal existence is confronted. Because human reason is insufficient to explain the course of man's fate on earth, one learns to have faith in the eternal mystery of life. In the end, life is inexplicable and evades all attempts at clarification or definition. "To find beauty in ugliness is the province of the poet," Hardy wrote.[10] The statement reveals the poet's faith that there is beauty in ugliness, or, in a broader context, that the world is more than what meets the eye and life more than reason can make of it.

The few poems that have been discussed in this concluding chapter illustrate the all-embracing conception of existence that Hardy attained. The faith that he eventually places in the imagination as the means with which to deal with inevitable and eternal mystery for what it is, enables him to abandon the tragic vision along with any tendencies he had to lapse into a negative and despairing pessimism. The imagination is synthetic in that it deals with all aspects of life and all the sides of man's mortal nature and combines them in what becomes an almost mystical

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[10]Hardy, The Early Life, p. 279.

conception of existence. This mystical conception is organic rather than supernatural. It is based on what man is in relation to the universe he can perceive and accepts the limitations imposed on mortal powers of perception. Mystery is perceived. All questions a man may ask concerning the nature or meaning of his existence must ultimately go unanswered unless they be met with answers that are not justified by the data perceptible by the human senses. When the ultimate mystery of life is accepted without any attempt to justify or explain it, the tragic mask is lifted. Hardy was ultimately able to reconcile himself to the mystery of man's fate in the universe.

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