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The Role of Nature Myths

in

The Major Novels

of

Thomas Hardy

by

Julie M. Fenwick

A thesis
presented to the University of Ottawa
in partial fulfilment of the
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Abstract

Thomas Hardy employs ancient nature myths to explore what seems to him to be the failure of Christianity to accommodate human sexuality or to provide a satisfying explanation for the existence of suffering. These myths are representative of an important early phase in the religious and cultural history of Western civilization. Nature myths, and the world view which is embodied in them, survive in the myths and drama of classical Greece, and in the folk-culture of western Europe. Hardy spent his childhood in intimate association with Wessex customs, festivals, magic and folk-lore which are survivals of pre-Christian British culture. His adult interest in archaeology, anthropology and folk-lore showed Hardy that customs and attitudes with which he had been familiar from childhood were remnants of an ancient and widespread culture which ante-dated Christianity by millenia.

The world view which is expressed in nature myths provides Hardy with several important points of contrast with Christianity which permit him to explore what he perceives as Christianity's "inadequacies." The cosmos is believed by nature worshippers to be an impersonal order which is governed by necessity. Deity, which is itself subject to this order, is immanent in the natural world, of which man is an integral part. Nature worship encourages a fatalistic attitude which minimizes human responsibility for sin, and which emphasizes the

importance of human decay and death in the fulfilment of natural cycles. Sexuality in nature worshipping cultures is regulated by societal standards, but these mores are not seen as divinely sanctioned.

Hardy uses nature myths to examine contrasting Christian values and concepts, such as the belief in an omnipotent and judgemental Creator, whose worship largely consists of obedience to divinely revealed law; and the conviction of the responsibility of man's sin for the introduction of death and pain into the world, and the necessity for suffering in the expiation of and atonement for sin. The enormous emphasis placed by Victorian orthodoxy on sexual "sin" is examined as an example of man's divorce from natural processes, and as an instance of a lack of "loving-kindness" arising from over concern with doctrinal conformity at the expense of charity.

In Hardy's early novels, characters who have both Biblical and mythic associations exist in intimate relationship with the natural world, meliorating its inevitable hardships, and drawing fortitude and spiritual consolation both from their Christian faith and from their contact with nature. In succeeding novels Hardy examines the progressive failure of the spiritual resources of both Christianity and nature. He creates characters who are displaced from their traditional relationship with nature, and from the comforting fatalism of nature worship, either by modern alienation, or by Christianity's concern with sin, expiation and atonement; or by both. Such characters are cut off from one source of their strength, and forced to rely solely on their Christian faith, which often proves inadequate to sustain them. Hardy's

characters' spiritual isolation from nature is often accompanied by their physical displacement from countryside to town, and thus their removal from the influence of the ancient cycles and rhythms of rural life. The erosion of Christian faith in these characters is frequently the result of their inability to cope with the demands of Christianity's "unnatural" sexual code, and its failure to explain the pain of life in a manner which does not involve the acceptance of a paradoxical relationship between divine love and divine judgement. Their alienation from nature and their loss of faith in the Christian God increasingly leave Hardy's characters both morally and spiritually bereft.

In his later novels Hardy becomes increasingly concerned with the necessity for the development of a meliorative moral code which is more in keeping with man's physical nature than is Victorian Christian orthodoxy. Hardy also comes to believe that the only hope of consolation for man in the face of the uncaring universe left by the loss of faith in the gods of nature and of Christianity is to be found in humane and rational relationships with other individuals.

Table of Contents

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CHAPTER I

Introduction:
Thomas Hardy,
Myth and Christianity

In his major novels Thomas Hardy consistently uses ancient myths of a goddess of fertility and her consort, the dying and reborn nature god, to explore contemporary social and religious issues.[1] Hardy compares the world view expressed in these myths, and in their classical derivatives, to that of Christianity in order to explore what seems to him to be the failure of Christianity to accommodate human sexuality or to provide satisfactory explanations for the existence of evil and suffering.[2] Hardy felt that some of the ancient belief systems which worshipped nature deities embodied a more "natural" moral code than did Victorian Christianity. Hardy does not advocate a return to primitive morality, but he does feel that an "accommodation of the social to the natural"[3] is imperative in a social system which is designed so that it meliorates rather than contributes to human misery. Hardy also felt that by offering mythical explanations for the necessity of suffering which were drawn from seasonal cycles of birth, growth, and decay, these beliefs provided their adherents with a more satisfying elucidation of the causes of human pain and mortality.

The nature myths which Hardy employs centre on an earth goddess, the All Mother, who was worshipped under a variety of names for thousands of years over a geographic area stretching from India to Ireland, and from Egypt to Scandinavia. She was originally a triple goddess, appearing as a maiden, as a sexually mature woman, and as a hag or witch, associated respectively with the new, full, and waning moon. In the Neolithic period, her worship became intimately related to the observance of the seasonal cycles of primitive agriculturalists, her three aspects also became associated with spring, summer, and winter, and she became a goddess of grain fertility. The Mother had as her consort a young man who was her son, lover, and sacrificial victim. To ensure that the earth goddess remained fruitful it was necessary that her consort should be a perennially young man at the peak of his potency. The god, therefore, died and was reborn yearly, and remained eternally young and virile. In these cultures kingship was bestowed by marriage with a priestess who represented the goddess, and in the earliest phase of this religion, as the god died, so died the king. This was later altered to the symbolic spiritual death and rebirth of the king, or to animal rather than human sacrifice. Just as the goddess was associated with the moon, so her consort was linked with the sun, and the yearly waning and waxing of the power of the sun came to represent his fluctuating potency. The king was ritually killed at the winter solstice (now December 21, but formerly December 25) when the power of the sun is lowest, and he was symbolically reborn in the person of the king's successor to preside as the god's representative over the return of warmth, light, and fertility to the earth. In some

cultures the god had a dark twin, or tanist, and the yearly cycle was divided between them, the tanist reigning from the midsummer solstice (June 21) to midwinter, and the god himself presiding from midwinter to midsummer. This was the case in ancient Britain. The ritual combat by which the god and his dark twin, represented by the king and his tanist, dispatched each other and were reborn at six month intervals, is preserved in the mumming plays which Hardy witnessed in the Wessex of his childhood.

These goddess worshipping, agricultural societies were matrilineal, and in some cases, matriarchal. They were conquered in the Bronze Age by patriarchal, god worshipping, pastoralists who entered the Middle East from the Syro-Arabian desert, and Greece and Britain from central and western Europe. In the Middle East, after a hard struggle, the cults of the goddess were suppressed, but in Greece, and to an even greater extent in Britain, the goddess and her consort survived, although they were fragmented and disguised. In Greece, for instance, the traditional rites and attributes of the goddess were distributed among the deities of the classical pantheon. She continued to be worshipped as the mother of gods under the name of Hera, her maidenly attributes were given to Artemis and Persephone, as the goddess of sexual love she became Aphrodite, as the divinity of corn fertility she was worshipped as Demeter, and as the hag she became the fates and the furies of classical Greece. Her consort survived as the semi-divine heroes of classic Greek myth, such as Perseus, Hercules, and Adonis, and his ultimate heirs are the doomed kings of Attic tragedy.

However, this "patriarchal inversion" of the nature myths, in which the goddess was discredited and relegated to a minor role, while her supremacy was usurped by male deities, reflects a major shift in attitudes towards man's relationship to nature and to deity. This shift, which is only moderately apparent in Greek classical civilization, is seen in its most extreme form in the strongly patriarchal religions of the Middle East, such as Judaïsm, Christianity, and Islam. The world view of nature worshippers was one in which the cosmos was governed by a vast, impersonal, and cyclic order, and man had a place in this order that was not very different from that of any other organism, save that he was capable of performing religious rituals which mimicked the cycles of the natural world, and which therefore contributed, by the power of sympathetic magic, to their continuance. There was no moral purpose attributed to this order; the principle act of worship was therefore not obedience to a set of divinely ordained laws, and sin was of negligible importance in the relationship of goddess and man. The fate of the individual was relatively unimportant, human free will was severely limited, and a strong sense of fatalism pervaded these religions. However, despite, and paradoxically even because of, this fatalism, these religions provided a comforting vision of human existence. For the goddess was the divinity of birth, procreation, death, and rebirth, all of which were equally significant and meaningful phases in the cycles of the cosmos, and to none of which was attached a moral valuation of good or evil. The history of the cosmos was enacted in the yearly cycle of the seasons, and also in every man's life history. This contrasts sharply

with the Christian sense of linear and historic time, of the Fall as an historical passage of the world from innocence to evil, and the Redemption as a unique event which is credited with overcoming the forces of evil and death. Rather than being a transcendent and judgemental divinity, the goddess was immanent in all creation, and could be worshipped simultaneously as the moon, the earth, the corn, or as a sow, mare, or cow. Furthermore, no claim was made by these cults to exclusive possession of divinely revealed truth. In the Hellenic era, when much of the territory in which the goddess had been worshipped was temporarily reunited into a cultural hegemony, historians and mythographers were clearly aware of the original identity of Astarte, Ashtoreth, Cybele, Aphrodite, and Isis, and of Tammuz, Attis, Adonis, and Osiris. Similarly, the inhabitants of Roman occupied Britain recognized in the classic pantheon the same divinities which they worshipped under other names. The coming of Christianity forced the nature worshippers of Britain to conduct their rites in secrecy, and these rites remained as the folklore, magic, and witchcraft of Hardy's childhood Wessex.

The mythic world view was thus an integral part of Hardy's early environment, and coexisted with his Christian heritage. From boyhood he was surrounded by an environment which abounded in the physical relics of Neolithic nature worshippers, and these often spectacular structures stimulated his imagination and excited his curiosity.[4] Many of the village customs were versions of millenia old religious rituals[5] and the life of his entire community was governed by seasonal festivals of which the origins can be traced back to the stone age, and which the

Christian Church adapted and incorporated into its own calendar.[6] Furthermore, the traditional attitude of his rural society was pervaded with the fatalism which was intimately associated with the myth of the earth goddess and her son/lover/victim. His adult interest in the classics, and in anthropology and archaeology, showed Hardy that these traditional customs and values, familiar from his childhood, were representative of a large section of the pagan world. Therefore, Hardy was deeply influenced by a traditional point of view which offered some highly significant points of contrast to Christianity. The major points of contrast between pagan and Christian attitudes were a belief in an impersonal cosmic order in which divinity was immanent in the natural world, versus a moral order created and governed by a judgemental and transcendent God; a belief in man as a part of the natural world whose personal experience was mirrored both by the history of his gods and by the cycles of nature, versus man as a being mediating between a fallen natural world and a God who is capable of suspending natural law at will; a strong sense of fatalism and the necessity for the individual to suffer and die that the cycle might be preserved, versus Christian concepts of man's responsibility for sin, and for the introduction of pain and suffering into the cosmos; and finally, the acceptance of sexuality as a part of the natural cycle, akin to birth and death, with no necessary opposition of the sexual to the spiritual, and no special divine sanctioning of social sexual codes.

Hardy's works are pervaded by the fatalistic vision of nature myths which he opposes to the Christian concept of the role of sin and divine punishment in the justification of suffering. Furthermore, he

contrasts the mythic sense of man as a part of the natural order with his own part to play in maintaining that order with the Christian view of man as a steward or overlord of nature who bears a unique relationship to deity. This removal of man from his proper participation in natural cycles, is, in Hardy's view, the Christian contribution to the sense of alienation which haunted the second half of the nineteenth century. The cyclic structure of the myths is used to suggest the continuity and satisfaction of life lived in intimate association with natural processes and this is contrasted to the spiritual and moral disorientaton of characters who have been displaced from intimacy with nature. For Hardy feels that the Christian vision alone is not enough to sustain man once he is alienated from the natural world and forced to rely solely on what Hardy perceives as the dubious comfort of Christian metaphysics. In addition, the loss of the fatalistic attitude embodied in nature myths, and a preoccupation with sin and guilt, bring characters into conflict with their own powerful instincts, and this places unbearable stresses on their religious faith. Thus the ultimate result of alienation from nature is often the accompanying loss of faith in Christianity.

This double loss has fearful implications for Hardy characters. For although they embody fundamentally different philosophies regarding man's relationship to deity and to the natural world, nature myths and Christianity share the assumption that some stable and meaningful relationship exists. Hardy contrasts this assumption with the spiritual and moral uncertainties of characters who become alienated both from the natural world represented by the myth, and from traditional

Christian belief.

It would be untrue to state that Hardy utterly rejects Christianity, or that he feels that it contains nothing of value for the melioration of the human condition. In many ways Christianity had a great appeal for Hardy, in particular as an ethical system. He admired deeply the Christian concept of charity, on which he modelled his own "loving-kindness": "[It] . . . will stand fast when the rest that you call religion has passed away!"[7] In 1885 Hardy expressed the desire that the Christian Church would evolve into "an undogmatic, non-theological establishment for the promotion of . . . virtuous living."[8] The speaker in "God's Funeral" mourns the passing of a deity, who although He is the faulty creation of man's own imagination, "Yet throughout all . . . symboled none the less /Potency vast and loving-kindness strong."[9] However, in Hardy's opinion, Victorian society's practice of charity was not as scrupulous as its adherence to Christian theory, and the meliorative power of Christ's message was too often negated by the insistence on doctrinal conformity at the expense of true loving-kindness. For instance, Hardy came to question the morality of a faith in which the selfish desire to save one's own soul led to the conscious infliction of pain on others.[10]

Thus Hardy's response to Christianity is complex and at times seems ambivalent. His apparent inconsistencies stem from his varying responses to Christianity as a moral, a metaphysical, and a social system. Further, his responses to some of these individual aspects are themselves ambivalent. Hardy finds serious fault with Christianity as a metaphysical system. Harvey Curtis Webster believes that as a child and

a youth Hardy experienced to the full the spiritual consolations of Christian metaphysics, stemming from a belief in "a transcendent God, omnipotent and beneficent, the guarantor of immortality, of the significance of each individual and of the ultimate victory of justice."[11] The undoubted attraction of this degree of certainty is expressed in a number of Hardy's poems,[12] but, despite Webster's eloquence, it is doubtful that Hardy's belief was preserved intact beyond early childhood. The peasant fatalism which was so significant a part of his mother Jemima's make-up seems to have been communicated to her son early in his intellectual life. Even as a child, Hardy says, "He Never Expected Much": "Since as a child I used to lie/ Upon the leaze and watch the sky,/ Never, I own, expected I/ That life would all be fair."[13] At the age of thirty Hardy wrote, "Mother's notion & also mine: That a figure stands in our van with an arm uplifted, to knock us back from any pleasant prospect which we indulge in as probable."[14]

Although at one time Hardy contemplated taking orders, read the Bible assiduously, and attended church regularly[15], this tendency to doubt the ultimate benignity of the universe predisposed him, while still a relatively young man, to the erosion of faith. He found it increasingly difficult to defend a belief in a loving and caring God who could, but for some inscrutable reason did not, spare man all pain. The permitted existence of avoidable evil by a conscious being was, to Hardy, morally repugnant. His reply to the argument that God's grand design necessitates some innocent suffering for which ultimate restitution will be made is that it is immoral of a conscious entity to

inflict this injustice on the individual. Hardy thus found an ultimately benign purpose on the part of Providence an inadequate explanation for the persistence of evil. The only way in which he could acquit the power which orders the universe of immorality is if it is blind or an automaton.[16]

Thus Hardy's faith, like that of many others, foundered on the problem of evil, the permitted existence of innocent suffering and death which Christianity dictates must be regarded as serving some end beyond the human ability to understand. By providing an alternative explanation for this problem which did not postulate a conscious, controlling entity, the theory of evolution played its part in the loss of Hardy's faith, as it did in that of other Victorians. It was extremely painful to Hardy to contemplate a universe in which many individuals suffer and die to no purpose beyond a blind, unconscious urge to existence on the part of the life force:

> If but some vengeful god would call to me
> From up the sky, and laugh: 'Thou suffering thing,
> Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,
> That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!'
>
> Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,
> Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;
> Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I
> Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.
>
> But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,
> And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?
> - Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,
> And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan . . .
> These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown
> Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain.[17]

Evolutionary theory presented Hardy with a model of the universe without any ultimate goal or planned end, with no purpose to be served by the death and suffering of large numbers of individuals, save the blind, unconscious urge of living things to propagate and preserve their type. To Hardy, the universe thus stood revealed as purposeless, and human suffering was unjustified even by the hope of ultimate restitution which he had rejected as an attempt to justify immoral means by an inscrutable end. Hardy's contemporary, James Frazer, believed that nature worship in many ways parallels this "modern notion of natural law or the view of nature as a series of events occurring in an invariable order without the intervention of personal agency."[18] This view persists in a slightly altered form in classical Greek culture in which it is believed that "even Chaos and the great Earth produced our world not through acts of creative will, but as seeds produce trees, out of the natural spontaneity of their substance," and that the universe is governed by "the vague yet always felt presence of the force of Moira, destiny, which limits even the gods."[19] Nature worship stresses the inevitable, cyclic repetitiveness of natural processes, which fosters a fatalistic acceptance of pain and mortality as part of the necessary order of things, to which even gods are subservient. These myths therefore provided Hardy with a useful counter to the Christian viewpoint.

The devastating effect of loss of faith in many of Hardy's contemporaries was increased because of the heights above nature to

which Christian theology had raised man, and his displacement from that position by evolutionary theory. In the Christian view, man is an overlord of nature, all living beings are designed to serve him, and man's sole responsibility towards nature is that of a steward answerable only to God.[20] To find oneself reduced to an instinctive bundle of reproductive energy, competing with other species for the right to exist, was a fall indeed. Hardy, therefore, uses nature myths as illustrations of a creed which offers a comforting vision of man as a part of nature. In this belief system the death of an individual man is a functional part of the natural cycle, for like the corn, he is engendered, matures, is fruitful, decays, and dies. Indeed, man has a limited but necessary role to play in the renewal of life and the preservation of the cycle, by ritual and sacrifice which propitiate the forces of darkness and death. These rituals give an illusion of some control over human destiny,[21] analogous to the Christian belief in the efficacy of prayer to influence the Divine Will. However, unlike the Christian, the nature worshipper faced with an unanswered prayer for the return of the earth's fertility, is not compelled to place his faith in an ultimate and inscrutable purpose. If the ritual fails, it is because some agency is interfering with the orderly progress of the cycle, and the eventual return of fertility to the earth reinforces the belief in the importance of human participation in maintaining these cycles. In a paradoxical way, a fatalistic acceptance of a faith that the ultimate purpose of the universe towards man is not benign can be a source of dignity, and even comfort. The widespread practice of magic among Dorset peasants, many

examples of which Hardy records in his notebooks and in his imaginative works,[22] is a survival of this belief in human participation in, and limited control over, natural processes, by a direct manipulation of natural forces, or by sacrificial propitiation of the divinities which control them.[23]

Thus Hardy's concept of the universe as controlled by blind, unconscious forces, his fatalism, and his belief in the important but limited human capacity for melioration, were rooted in attitudes which were present in his childhood environment, and which found expression in the nature myths of his ancestral culture. It is this paradoxical association of a strong sense of fatalism with a firm belief in the necessity for melioration which caused Hardy to reject the label of pessimist and to pronounce himself a meliorist.

While the fatalism of nature myth frees man from an overwhelming sense of human responsibility for sin, his limited meliorative capacity imposes an ethical imperative to do what he can to better the human condition. Hardy contrasts this viewpoint with the Christian insistence on man's sole responsibility for sin, and on the necessity for atonement and expiation. Hardy refuses to accept the Christian moral evaluation of man as essentially sinful.[24] The pagan self-assertion[25] of many Hardy characters is contrasted to the self-denial and guilt of other individuals who labour under a sense of sin. The sense of sin is relatively unimportant in the fatalist view of the nature myths, as human error can only slightly alter events, and in many cases is preordained by the gods, or by the fate to which even these deities are subservient. The source of most human misery is not

original or personal sin, and, therefore, suffering is not increased by an attendant conviction of guilt, and man has the right to meliorate what suffering he can, rather than enduring it passively as merited punishment for sin, or even seeking to increase it as an act of expiation. Hardy, who inherited the fatalism of nature myth in his childhood environment, believes that, in an unconscious, amoral universe, man is the only source of ethical judgement, which he must use to meliorate the suffering caused by nature's blindness. The failure to meliorate evil by accepting suffering as punishment for original or personal sin is to Hardy an abandonment of social responsibility.

For although Hardy finds orthodox Christianity intellectually unsatisfying and lacking in spiritual consolation, it is the Church as a social institution which arouses his bitterest criticism. The religious ferment within and without the Established Church in the Victorian era served to render Christianity even more irrelevant to the life of the average Wessex peasant, at the very time at which he was being displaced from his traditional intimate relationship with his native landscape by increasing rural mobility, the enforced movement to urban centres to find work, and the introduction of large scale "scientific" farming methods.[26] Mr. Maybold's commendable energy in visiting his parishioners is an improvement upon the lack of spiritual guidance provided by his predecessor, but his remoteness from the everyday lives of his flock inhibits them and makes his visits a nuisance to be endured.[27] The intimate knowledge of, and respect for, his people's immemorial way of life which was characteristic of

William Barnes[28] struck Hardy as the finest kind of clerical social responsibility. Hardy greatly admired Barnes' "single minded purpose to minister to his flock"[29] despite the fame which his literary efforts brought him.

Similarly, the Reverend Henry Moule, the father of Hardy's friend and intellectual mentor, Horace Moule, was the prototype for the Reverend Mr. Clare. Henry Moule was noted both for his learning and for his energetic attempts to improve the lives of his parishioners. During the cholera epidemics of 1849 and 1852, Mr. Moule prevented the spread of infection by enforcing a strict quarantine, visited the sick, and buried the dead. He also agitated successfully for an improved drainage system to prevent further outbreaks.[30] Thus, although Henry Moule was an adherent to the rigid old Evangelical school, Hardy admired him because of his actively meliorating influence on his parishioners' lives. Like Moule, Mr. Clare, a rigid Paulinist of narrow minded theological views, is nonetheless unselfish and self-sacrificing in the service of his parishioners, and fearless in the defence of what he perceives as the truth. His sons, in contrast, follow the theological fashions, and, if more tolerant of the sin, have less personal concern for the sinner. Felix and Cuthbert represent the "modern" clergymen who are more concerned with the Church as a social institution than as a service to their fellow man, and who become so involved in the niceties of ritual and dogma that they lose sight of the great ethical teachings of Christ.[31]

But it is the action of the Church in lending divine sanction to arbitrary social laws to which Hardy objects most strenuously, and

particularly in relation to sexual mores.[32] Hardy regarded marriage as a dubious enterprise at best, a social contract usually entered into as a way of assuaging the sexual instinct, without any regard for the qualities necessary to a harmonious life-long association:

> If hours be years the twain are blest,
> For now they solace swift desire
> By bonds of every bond the best,
> If hours be years. The twain are blest
> Do eastern stars slope never west,
> Nor pallid ashes follow fire.
> If hours be years the twain are blest,
> For now they solace swift desire. [33]

Hardy sees the sexual instinct as a blind natural force which uses men and women to propagate the type without any regard for their personal happiness. This in part explains Hardy's tolerance towards sexual lapses. Another reason for this tolerance is that he lived in a boyhood environment in which pregnant brides and illegitimate babies occurred frequently and were accepted fatalistically as part of the natural order of things.[34] In contrast, Christianity endows this impersonal force with the sanction of marriages made in heaven, imposing human moral standards on an amoral universe. The world of nature myths saw human sexuality as a part of the creative cycle. The festivals according to which Hardy's village community regulated its life were remnants of a religion which worshipped the reproductive powers of nature as a goddess, and the seasonal decay and renewal of the world's fertility as a dying and reborn god. Together, these

deities also represented the power of female fertility and male potency to overcome the awful forces of darkness, cold, and individual death. The pagan world, in Hardy's view, clearly recognized that the rules which govern marriage and sex are purely cultural conventions which are designed for the convenience and stability of society, and are therefore unencumbered by theological sanctions and prohibitions. Whole-hearted peasants such as Arabella Fawley and Joan Durbeyfield pragmatically view marriage purely as a social convention, and are not averse to using the sexual instinct to secure the social benefits of the married state.[35] Joan tries to use conventional morality to better her family socially by deliberately exposing her innocent but voluptuous daughter to a rake.[36] When Tess returns seduced, pregnant, and unwed, Joan fatalistically states that, "we must make the best of it. . . . 'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God,"[37] a statement with which the local vicar might take issue. For as well as raising marriage from a social contract to a sacrament, Victorian Christianity damns as sin any deviation from socially sanctioned sexual morality, with horrifying results for certain Hardy characters.

Thus Hardy's criticism of Christianity is that it fails to meliorate the inevitable sorrow of human experience because its explanations for the existence of pain and evil serve only to increase man's unhappiness by introducing the doctrines of sin and expiation. Further, the social institutions which the Church sanctions often increase the sum of human suffering by ignoring the power and irrationality of man's instincts, as part of a general denial of man's role as a full participant in the natural world. Hardy uses nature

myths, whose vision informed the Wessex of his childhood, to point out that nineteenth century alienation actually deprived Christianity of a complementary belief system which compensated for its own "insufficiency." Therefore, Christianity's contribution to this process of alienation was ultimately self-defeating.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1 The information on nature myths in this chapter is drawn from several sources. Joseph Campbell's The Masks of God, Vol. I Primitive Mythology, 2nd. ed. and Vol. III Occidental Mythology, 2nd. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1969, 1976), trace the myth of the earth goddess from prehistoric times to the Middle Ages. Campbell discusses at length the "patriarchal inversion" and its implications for the subsequent development of European religion. He repeatedly contrasts the fatalism of ancient fertility cults with the preoccupation with sin and with divine law of "Semitic" religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Robert Graves' The Greek Myths, 2 vols., 2nd. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960) provides an exhaustive analysis of the major myths of classical Greece and reveals their relationship to the nature myths of which they are adaptations. Graves' speculative, but stimulating, The White Goddess, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber Limited,1961), provides many valuable references to the survival of the rites and beliefs of nature worshippers in the British Isles. Jane E. Harrison traces the evolution in pre-Dorian Greece of the cult of the goddess from primitive rites of sympathetic magic to promote the earth's fertility, and she explores the superimposition of Olympian worship on the rites of older Chthonic deities [Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, 3rd ed. (1903; rpt. New York: Meridian Books, 1955)]. In Themis, Harrison and Gilbert Murray trace the origin of Attic tragedy to the folk plays of Attica which celebrated the life history of a fertility god, and to the rites of Dionysos in his aspect as the dying and reborn god. [Themis: A study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion (1912; rpt. Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1962), pp. 332, 341ff.]

2 An accurate idea of the extent of nineteenth century knowledge of nature myths can be gained from James Frazer's The Golden Bough, which was published in eleven volumes between 1890 and 1915, and which is a scholarly synthesis of contemporary anthropological and archaeological knowledge of fertility cults, their relationship to classical myths, and the survival of their observances among contemporary European peasants. Frazer used a variety of classical sources with which Hardy was familiar, and when Hardy read The Golden Bough in 1891 he commented on the similarity between the rites practised by Dorset peasants and those described by Frazer [see Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography (New York: Random House,1982), p. 315]. In 1885 Hardy read an article by Professor Max Muller, [see Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 270n.] in which Muller points out that many myths of the classical period were based on much older nature myths and that a number of Greek philosophers, and perhaps Greek poets, appear to be aware of this

origin ["Solar Myths," The Nineteenth Century, 18 (1885), 900-922]. Hardy also read John Addington Symonds' Studies of the Greek Poets (1870) and his friend Edward Clodd's Myths and Dreams (1885). [see G. Glen Wickens, "Hardy and the Aesthetic Mythographers: The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in Tess of the d'Urbervilles," University of Toronto Quarterly, 53 (1983), 85-106].

3 James Hazen, "The Tragedy of Tess Durbeyfield," Texas Studies in Literature and Languages, 11 (1969), 793.

4 Hardy's boyhood and young manhood were years of intensive archaeological activity in the Wessex area. In Prehistoric Avebury (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), Aubrey Burl cites thirty-four publications between 1801 and 1894 on ancient monuments in the Wessex area, twenty of them published between 1840 and 1870. Two "Romano-British" skeletons and a "Druid stone" were unearthed during the construction of Hardy's home at Max Gate. Hardy wrote a careful description of the skeletons in situ, which was eventually published in the proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, of which Hardy was long a member. Hardy also wrote articles on Stonehenge and on the excavations of Maumbury Ring [see W. M. Parker "Thomas Hardy on Maumbury Rings," Monographs on the Life, Times and Works of Thomas Hardy, Vol. I, ed. J. Stevens Cox (Guernsey: The Toucan Press, 1971), Monograph No. 23 and "Some Romano-British Relics Found at Max Gate, Dorchester," and "Shall Stonehedge Go?" Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, ed. Harold Orel (Laurence: University of Kansas Press, 1966), 191-195; 200-201]. Hardy's lifelong interest in archaeology, folklore, and anthropology led him to secure introductions to some of the leading experts in these fields, such as General Pitt-Rivers, Sir James Frazer, Sir Flinders Petrie, and Edward Clodd, with whom he maintained for many years a correspondence (See Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography, pp. 364, 392, 412-413, 424).

5 Ruth Firor's Folkways in Thomas Hardy (1931; rpt. New York: Russel and Russel, 1968), is an admirable discussion of the relationship of Wessex festivals, customs, folklore, and physical monuments to fertility myth, and of Hardy's incorporation of these elements into his novels.

6 Frazer, in The Golden Bough, 1922 (rpt. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 418, and Graves, in The White Goddess, elucidate a pagan influence on many major Christian festivals. The dates and many of the rites of fertility cults were adopted by the Christian Church and "the continuity of the ancient British festal system remained unaffected even when the Anglo-Saxons professed Christianity. English social life was based on agriculture, grazing, and hunting, . . . [and on] the popular celebration of the festivals now known as . . . May Day, Midsummer Day . . . and Christmas." (Graves, pp. 23-24).

7 Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 369.

[8] Thomas Hardy, quoted in Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography, p. 247.

[9] Thomas Hardy, "God's Funeral," The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 326-329.

[10] Thomas Hardy, Jude, pp. 361, 381.

[11] Harvey Curtis Webster, On a Darkling Plain (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1947; rpt. Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1964), p. 22.

[12] For example, "The Impercipient," "The Oxen," "God's Funeral."

[13] Thomas Hardy, "He Never Expected Much," Complete Poems, p. 9.

[14] Thomas Hardy, The Personal Notebooks of Thomas Hardy, ed. Richard H. Taylor (London: Macmillan, 1978), pp. 6-7.

[15] Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography, p. 65.

[16] Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy: 1840-1928 (1962; rpt. Hamden: Archon Books, 1970), pp. 314-315.

[17] Thomas Hardy, "Hap," Complete Poems, p. 9.

[18] James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 12.

[19] Joseph Campbell, Occidental Mythology, Vol.III of The Masks of God, pp. 179-180.

[20] Along the sculptures of the western wall
I watched the moonlight creeping:
It moved as if it hardly moved at all,
Inch by inch thinly peeping
Round on the pious figures of freestone, brought,
And poised there when the Universe was wrought
To serve its centre, Earth, in mankind's thought.

Thomas Hardy, "A Cathedral Facade at Midnight," Complete Poems, p. 703

[21] James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 187.

[22] See Thomas Hardy's Notebooks, ed. Evelyn Hardy (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 37, 40, and "The Withered Arm," The New Wessex Edition of the Stories of Thomas Hardy, Vol. 1, ed. F.B. Pinion (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 56-81.

[23] James Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 60.

[24] J.O. Bailey, Thomas Hardy and the Cosmic Mind (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1956), pp. 47-48.

25 Ward Hellstrom, " Jude the Obscure as pagan Self-Assertion," Victorian Newsletter, 29 (1966), 26-27.

26 Thomas Hardy, "The Dorsetshire Labourer," Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, pp. 172, 179-182.

27 Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 70-71.

28 The Reverend William Barnes, in addition to his duties as parish priest to a Dorset village, wrote poems in the Wessex dialect which in the nineteenth century was being eroded by the standard English which was taught in the state schools. See Thomas Hardy, "The Reverend William Barnes, B.D.," and "An Unsigned Review of Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect, " in Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, pp. 100-106; 94-99.

29 Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography (London: Hogarth Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1954; rpt. New York: Russel & Russel, 1970), p. 193.

30 Ibid., p. 49.

31 Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 202-215; Jude, pp. 346-347.

32 James Hazen, "Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Antigone," English Literature in Transition, 14 (1971), 209.

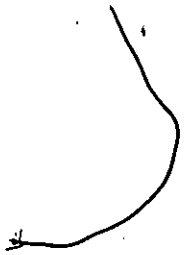
33 Thomas Hardy, "At a Hasty Wedding," Complete Poems, p. 142.

34 Millgate, Thomas Hardy: A Biography, p. 15.

35 Thomas Hardy, Jude, pp. 202-203, 209.

36 Thomas Hardy, Tess, p. 104.

37 Ibid.



CHAPTER II

Old Wessex:

Far from the Madding Crowd

Far from the Madding Crowd is an evocation of old Wessex in which the mythic vision coexists with, and compensates for, what Hardy perceives as the shortcomings of Christianity. The novel illustrates the 1500 year old compromise between Christian orthodoxy and the viewpoint of nature myth which persisted among the peasants of south-west England as long as they remained in intimate contact with natural processes, and formed part of a settled community whose customs, superstitions, and festivals represented an unbroken continuity with pre-Christian Britain.[1]

The villagers express their appreciation of the traditional laissez-faire policy of incumbents of the Established Church which facilitates this compromise, and they contrast this tolerance with the evangelical fervour of chapel members, which is so disturbing to their comfort:

> . . . there's this to be said for the Church, a man can belong to the Church and bide in his cheerful old inn, and never trouble or worry his mind about doctrines at all. But to be a meetinger, you must go to chapel in all winds and weathers, and make yerself

as frantic as a skit.[2]

Jan Coggan speaks with affection and respect of the village priest who tolerates his lapses from orthodoxy, and who once supplied the villager with a desperately needed sack of seed potatoes, which Parson Thirdly could ill afford to give away (p. 328). This combination of practical acts of Christian charity with a tolerance of local custom seemed to Hardy to represent the Church at its best. Hardy contrasts Parson Thirdly with wealthy Bath clergymen, with "modern" priests who adopt the attitude of stern Old Testament patriarchs towards their flocks, and with even more extreme chapel goers, who forsake the aesthetic joys of Church of England ritual to "worship drab and whitewash" (pp. 254-255). These changes within and without the Established Church pose a threat to the peasant compromise of Christianity and myth, which results in the religious and moral confusion of later Hardy characters, such as Tess Durbeyfield. The fate of Gabriel's dog vividly illustrates the dangers of this loss of balance, as he suffers "the untoward fate which so often attends dogs and other philosophers who . . . attempt perfectly consistent conduct in a world made up so largely of compromise" (p. 42).

The character of Gabriel Oak is Hardy's description of a man who is ideally poised between Christianity and nature myth, and who draws spiritual comfort and moral strength from both. Like the other villagers, Gabriel has only a formal affinity with the Established Church, and the formulae of Christian worship are largely irrelevant to his daily life (p. 1). However, Gabriel is touched and influenced by

the gentle charity of Parson Thirdly, who treats the memory of the sinner Fanny Robin with compassion, and grants to her death a measure of dignity (p. 333).

Gabriel, and to a lesser extent, Bathsheba, combine a strong association with nature myth with extensive Biblical associations. Gabriel Oak's name indicates that he is the point of contact of two mythological symbol systems, the Christian and the pagan. "Gabriel" means "man of God," but the angel Gabriel is also associated in west country folklore with the oak god Herne, a figure from Celtic myth.[3] The oak tree has immemorial associations with nature worship, kingship, and sacrifice.[4] Thus, even in his names, Gabriel Oak shows a distinctly pagan influence, and a Christian context which is heavily tinged with nature worship. Gabriel's occupation reflects the Christian image of the Good Shepherd, but this is in fact borrowed from much older religions in which the sacred king, the nature god's representative, was hailed as the shepherd of his people.[5] Gabriel's small library reflects his dual inheritance. Along with practical works of animal care, Gabriel owns Paradise Lost and Pilgrim's Progess. While Paradise Lost tells of the Fall of man, Pilgrim's Progress deals with God's grace and the Christian redemption, and together these works contain the Christian doctrine of spiritual death and rebirth which parallels the history of the dying and reborn god of nature myth.

Gabriel's associations with nature myth are numerous and significant. The cyclic pattern of his history reiterates that of the dying and reborn god, and his association with Bathsheba Everdene

parallels the relations of the god to his mother and lover, the earth goddess. Bathsheba's Biblical name means "voluptuous," and she is associated with the myrtle plant, mirrors, the colour red, and bees, all of which are emblems of the goddess in her aspect as the divinity of sexual love, who was known to the classical world as Aphrodite and Venus (pp. 4-5, 204, 343).[6] Bathsheba is the queen of the corn market, and she is also an accomplished horsewoman (pp. 17-18, 194). The goddess was worshipped at various times as a grain deity, known in Greece as corn-Demeter, and as a horse deity or mare-Demeter.[7] Bathsheba is described as classically beautiful in face and body, and she is referred to as Ashtoreth, Venus, and Juno, all names under which the goddess has been worshipped (pp. 12, 105, 351). This divinity rescues Gabriel and restores him to life near the time of the winter solstice, the traditional date for the death of the god and his rebirth as the summer king (pp. 8, 22-24).[8] Gabriel's place in Bathsheba's affections is supplanted by Troy on an evening in midsummer, the time of the year at which the summer king was customarily replaced as the god's representative by the winter king (p. 208).[9] The traditional sexual associations of the date of the festival of the god and goddess of fertility is reflected in the frequency with which Hardy characters choose this as a wedding day and in midsummer customs by which girls attempt to learn the identity of their future husbands.[10] It is the turn of the solar year at which the power of the sun in temperate latitudes reaches its height and begins to wane, and it represents both the peak of the god's potency and the moment at which the passing of his power begins.

Gabriel's dark twin or supplanter, Troy, has a name which is reminiscent of the "troy-towns" of the west of England, the turf labyrinths which were constructed by prehistoric Britons, which may be related to the double spiral used by Celtic peoples to depict the cycle of death and rebirth.[11] Troy is killed on Christmas Eve, the Christian solstitial festival, and Gabriel is thereby free to claim a place as Bathsheba's husband. As Troy dies, Bathsheba takes him on her lap to form a pieta and later she performs the traditional function of the goddess as the layer out of the dead god (pp. 411, 437, 439-440).

In contrast to Bathsheba and Gabriel, Boldwood is given uncompromisingly Biblical associations. Boldwood is an Old Testament prophet who denies Bathsheba her proper homage as the divinity of the corn market. He is also a puritan, a celibate monk who makes a cloister of his stables. Boldwood proposes to marry Bathsheba and to remove her from farmwork, cutting her off from participation in the seasonal activities of harvest and haymaking. Boldwood thus epitomizes the Christian attempt to cut man loose from his place as a participant in nature, and to elevate him to a stewardship responsible only to God, making the seasons of the year calendar events, instead of profound reminders of individual mortality and racial survival. When he is rejected by Bathsheba, Boldwood neglects his farm and despairs of God, for because of his alienation from nature, Christianity is insufficient to sustain him in the vicissitudes of existence (pp. 110, 112, 137, 146, 294-295).

In contrast, Gabriel Oak's compromise of Christianity and myth enables him to cope successfully with his fall from being a "pastoral

king" to being a humble farm worker (pp. 43-44) and his steadfastness under misfortune leads to his financial and social regeneration as a farm steward. All the calamities and successes to which Gabriel is subjected correspond to the natural cycles of birth and death, regeneration and harvest, which govern his life as a shepherd and farm steward. His strength and endurance, and his lack of recrimination of fate, stem from his intimacy with the natural world and from his "paganized" Christianity, which do not lead him to suppose himself to be the centre of all events, but only one participant among many in the joys and sorrows of life (p. 338).

Gabriel's attitude is not, however, one of blind submission to the dictates of an unconscious and impersonal nature. Gabriel is a meliorator, who exercises his limited free will to alleviate what he cannot avert.[12] Gabriel enters Bathsheba's service when he saves her corn ricks from fire, and as "an epitome of the world's health and vigour" (p. 120) he rescues frail newborn lambs from death. After Bathsheba and Gabriel quarrel they make their peace because Gabriel saves Bathsheba's sheep from bloat. Gabriel is so in tune with his natural surroundings that he reads in the behaviour of toads and slugs a warning from the "Great Mother" that natural disaster is in store. Once again Gabriel preserves Bathsheba's corn, this time from fire and water. Gabriel risks his life to save the crop but he takes all available precautions; he constructs a home-made lightning rod which saves himself, Bathsheba, and her corn (pp. 50-54, 127, 166, 277-278). The fatalism of nature myth accepts that fire and water, loss and death occur inevitably, but man may construct lightning rods and protect the

weak and helpless to mitigate these calamities.

In contrast, Troy ignores the Mother's warning, and his responsibility to meliorate the unconscious cruelty of nature (pp. 276-282). Troy's mythic role in the novel is intermediate between that of Gabriel and that of Boldwood. Although he fills the role of Bathsheba's winter king, Troy is an irresponsible consort to the goddess and he acts as a blight on the rural community (p. 426), by his unfaithfulness to Bathsheba as a husband and to the goddess as the fructifier of the earth. Wickens points out that whereas Gabriel is associated with cultivated land, such as grain fields and pastures, Troy is generally seen against a wild, uncultivated landscape.[13] The worship of the god and goddess of fertility is intimately and anciently associated with agriculture, and the cultivation of crops is at heart a meliorist enterprise, an attempt to compensate for nature's caprice by ensuring a steady supply of food. Troy's refusal to participate responsibly in agricultural activities is therefore an apostasy both to the goddess and to God. He is neither a full participant in and meliorator of nature, like Gabriel, nor a responsible steward like Boldwood.

Thus of the three male figures who compete for the favours of the "goddess" Bathsheba, one lives in the myth, one opposes it, and one participates in it only half-heartedly. Gabriel, who accommodates his Christianity to a mythic participation in natural cycles, is strengthened both by his contact with nature and by his religious beliefs. Troy, who pays only lip service to his role as consort of the goddess, or to God, is killed on their common religious festival.

Boldwood, who withdraws from intimacy with nature and adopts a Christian position of dominance over it, is destroyed emotionally and spiritually. It appears that, for Hardy, man's intense need for the consolations of mythology can only be fulfilled by nineteenth century Christianity when it is combined with the symbols and attitudes of much older nature worship, as it was in the rural Wessex of Hardy's boyhood.

Bathsheba is, of course, not only the symbol of the goddess whom Hardy uses as a focus of contrasting mythic and Christian views of man's relationship to nature; she is also a young and desirable woman, and the men's motives in competing for her are sexual. In Far from the Madding Crowd Hardy's ambivalent attitude towards sex and marriage is apparent. The desirable and spirited Bathsheba initially wants the social position of marriage without the inconvenience of a husband, because she regards marriage as possession of the woman by the man (pp. 33, 148). But her conscious objections are overcome by her sexual instinct. Bathsheba's objections to marriage are a part of her family heritage; her father could only remain faithful to his wife by pretending that they were unmarried and playing at adultery. This "'ungodly remedy'" was necessary because "'the man's will was to do right, . . . but his heart didn't chime in,'" the irrationality of the sexual instinct overcoming Everdene's conscious desire to be faithful to the marriage contract into which he had entered (pp. 69-70).

Bathsheba falls victim to Troy's sexual fascination when she is mesmerized by his frankly erotic demonstration of the military sword drill. In a wilderness of ferns, on an evening in midsummer, dazzled by the reflected light of the setting sun, "she felt powerless to

withstand or deny" Troy's sexual fascination (pp. 208-213). Later, Bathsheba decides to break her engagement to Troy, but marries him due to a combination of piqued vanity and sexual blackmail. Having accidently compromised herself by meeting Troy alone in a strange city, Bathsheba's fear of scandal combines with jealousy and she marries precipitately (p. 290). This disastrous step is thus the result of an irrational impulse arising out of her sexual instinct, and a fear of violating the Victorian sexual code -- the combination of an unavoidable natural evil with a social stricture which makes the problem worse, not better. Bathsheba is ultimately humbled by her sexual instinct; she feels violated and polluted by her surrender to Troy, even within the bonds of marriage, by the enslavement of the soul to the body which, in Hardy's view, characterizes victims of the sexual drive (pp. 315-316). When Troy disappears, Bathsheba flies to the opposite extreme and agrees to marry Boldwood, even at the sacrifice of her own happiness, as a penance for having made him miserable. It is the well-balanced Gabriel who points out that this "Christian" act of self-immolation and expiation is in fact a greater sin than marrying merely to satisfy lust. As in the case of Sue Bridehead, Hardy implies that such a loveless and passionless marriage is a form of prostitution (pp. 407-409).

Bathsheba's regeneration lies in marriage to Gabriel, a relationship which is based on affection, companionship, and mutual respect, "the compounded feeling [which] proves itself to be the only love which is strong as death -- that love which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown, beside which the passion usually called

by the name is evanescent as steam" (pp. 457, 462). This love is in tune with the whole meliorist stance of Far from the Madding Crowd, for it is an illustration of man's ethical duty to meliorate the unavoidable ravages of a powerful natural force, the sexual instinct, with intelligence and loving-kindness, under the dual guidance of pagan fatalism and Christian charity.

However, in The Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbridge the intrusive Christian concepts of sin and atonement begin the disruption of this meliorating compromise of Christian and pagan values, and the process of alienation from nature begins to undermine the security and consolation of traditional Wessex life.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

[1] For a discussion of the customs and beliefs of Neolithic Wessex farmers see Aubrey Burl, Prehistoric Avebury (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1979), pp. 79-83. This description, by an eminent archaeologist, of the lives of the Neolithic inhabitants of Wessex illustrates the antiquity and continuity of the customs and attitudes of Hardy's boyhood environment.

[2] Thomas Hardy, Far From the Madding Crowd (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 328; hereafter cited in text.

[3] Bryn W. Caless, "Hardy's Characters and the Significance of Their Names," Thomas Hardy Yearbook, 4 (1974), 12. Robert Graves, The White Goddess, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 151.

[4] Graves, p. 65.

[5] Joseph Campbell, Primitive Mythology, Vol. I of The Masks of God, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 412-413.

[6] Caless, p. 10. Graves, pp. 171-172, 192, 395.

[7] Graves, p. 354.

[8] Ibid., p. 111.

[9] Ibid., p. 126.

[10] Thomas Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree (London: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 54, 186. Desperate Remedies (London: Macmillan, 1966), p.446. The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 168.

[11] Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 92n. Graves, p. 103.

[12] G. Glen Wickens, "Literature and Science: Hardy's Response to Mill, Huxley and Darwin," Mosaic 14 (1981), 66-68.

[13] Ibid., pp. 67-68.

Chapter III

Sin and Atonement:
The Return of the Native
and
The Mayor of Casterbridge

(i)

In The Return of the Native the alienation from nature which, in Hardy's opinion, results in part from a strict adherence to Christian values, is explored. Egdon Heath is a piece of the pagan world which endures into the nineteenth century, and Clym's return to Egdon illustrates the attempt of modern, alienated man to return to the consolations of mythic unity with nature. However, this return is made impossible by an adherence to Christianity's preoccupation with sin, and to its attempt to see a moral purpose in an unconsciously ordered and indifferent universe. The polarization of mythic and Christian world views over the issue of sin results in the erosion of the fruitful compromise which sustained Gabriel Oak in Far from the Madding Crowd, and this divorce of Christianity from the natural world represented by the fertility myths contributes to Eustacia's and Clym's

downfall.

The presence of prehistoric myths in The Return of the Native is immediately apparent from the opening chapters, and very explicit references are made to the history of such myths and to their intimate relationship with the lives of Wessex peasants. Hardy's awareness of the continuity of Egdon customs and of the survival under modern names of ancient pagan festivals is very clear. The men and boys who kindle November bonfires,

> had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. . . . Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot.[1]

Moreover Hardy sees such acts as a spontaneous human protest against the return of recurrent and inevitable sterility, darkness, and death, an attempt to aid "the fettered gods of the earth" to maintain the orderly progression of the cycle, so that spring, warmth, and fertility may return in their appointed time (pp. 17-18). In such an environment, Christianity is largely superfluous and irrelevant to people who still pattern their lives by these Neolithic festivals, magic, and superstitions (pp. 21, 101).

Like Gabriel Oak, Clym plays a role in the cycles of the myths,

and he also has Biblical associations. In his mythic role Clym is associated with three women who represent the goddess in her aspects of mother, maiden, and seductress, and he possesses a dark twin, a rival who alternates with him as the goddess's lover. Clym's qualities as a prophet, priest, and king (p. 204) identify him both with those Old Testament leaders who combined all three functions, and with the prehistoric pagan kings who were the nature god's representative and were ritually sacrificed at solstitial celebrations.[2] However, within Clym his dual pagan and Christian heritages exist in uneasy compromise, for his superior education and his absence from Egdon have exposed him to the "disease" of alienation which results from increased self-consciousness. Clym lacks the ideal physical beauty which Hardy believes is possible only in a man who is well integrated with his natural surroundings (pp. 197-198): "He already showed that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with . . . a full recognition of the coil of things" (p. 162). The Biblical figure with whom Clym is ultimately associated is that of Jesus (p. 484), the dying and reborn God of Christianity, the proponent of the doctrine of loving-kindness which Hardy so deeply admires, and the figure about whom cluster Christian concerns wih sin and expiation which Hardy wishes to reject. Hardy's ambivalence towards the individually attractive figure of Christ, who is central to the Christian doctrine of sin, is reflected in the ambivalence of Clym's makeup, and in the irony of Hardy's attitude towards him.[3]

Unlike Clym, Eustacia is an unequivocal pagan. "Eustacia" means

"rich in corn"[4] and she is compared to Artemis, Hera, Athena, and Venus, names under which the goddess was known to the classical world (pp. 77, 167). She is also a witch, another aspect of the goddess, and a mythic embodiment of the potential dangers of female sexuality to men (pp. 67, 73, 208-209).[5] Our first view of Eustacia is as she stands atop Rainbarrow, where she appears to be an organic part of the landscape. Egdon is lit only by bonfires which Hardy likens to wounds in the hides of sacrificial animals, or to Maenades, the women who, in ecstatic frenzy, tear the god to pieces (p. 75).[6] Eustacia is the Queen of Night, in her passions and caprice indistinguishable from the Fates which govern men's lives, the Fates which are yet another classical derivative of the All Mother (p. 75).[7] Eustacia is also linked with legendary royal women, such as Candaules' wife (who killed her husband and took a shepherd as her new lover) in another distortion of the goddess/dying god myth (pp. 105, 109). But Eustacia is a discontented divinity, who hates Egdon, even though it is the source of her queenliness. Eustacia uses prehistoric urns as flowerpots for razor leaved cacti, doesn't notice the existence of a "Druidical stone," and declares that she "hates" nature (pp. 79, 142, 219-220).

In contrast, Thomasin has a very prosaic view of Egdon. She is a peasant in familiar surroundings, fatalistically accepting its occasional discomforts without railing against them as Eustacia does (p. 433). Thomasin is associated with apples and doves, both of which are ancient symbols of the goddess, and she represents the divinity in her gentle maidenly aspect (p. 129). Clym's mother wishes him to marry Thomasin and to continue in his profession, hoping that he may thereby

maintain the precarious equilibrium between his profound links with Egdon and the modern world. Mrs. Yeobright's belief that Eustacia can only disrupt Clym's life is well justified, for within her there is a heightened polarization of the natural world, as exemplified by her powerful sexuality, and the modern, alienated world of her ambitious daydreams. Eustacia's ignorant yearnings for the delights of a sophisticated city existence which she has never experienced cause her to reject her own deepest nature, and this leads to her destruction. This destruction is hastened by the powerful sexual instinct which mercilessly drives the mismatched Clym and Eustacia into one another's arms.

Eustacia, of all Hardy's heroines, is the one in whom the natural sexual instinct is least under rational control, and her unstable desire "to be loved to madness" leads her to bewitch first Damon and then Clym (pp. 79, 391, 439). Hardy places Eustacia's sexual morality somewhere between that of Heloise, a woman who offended, out of love, against the Christian sexual code and who was forced into a lifetime of celibacy as penitence for her sin of impurity, and that of Cleopatra, an unabashed pagan who used her sexuality to further her worldly ambitions (p. 82). Eustacia's paganism may, as Paterson suggests, have been originally intended to represent the free celebration of the natural instincts,[8] but here, as always, Hardy shows untrammelled self indulgence in the passions as a way to self-destruction. Eustacia's desire to fascinate Clym unleashes in him a flood of sexuality unlike anything in his experience. Clym's and Eustacia's manifest unsuitablility as life partners, their totally different goals

and ambitions, cannot withstand the tide of sexuality which draws them together (pp. 231-236).

The opposite pole of sexuality is provided by the impotent figure of Christian Cantle. Born on a night of no moon, when the goddess refused to show her face, Christian is "'only the rames of a man, and no good for my race at all,'" the man no woman will marry, half witted and eternally fearful (pp. 26-28). Therefore, neither Eustacia's selfish and manipulative sexuality nor Christian's enforced abstinence are held up by Hardy as models worthy of emulation. In sexual mores, as in all else, Hardy is a meliorist, advocating a middle course by which the sexual passions might be rendered less disruptive of human happiness.

Thus Clym's internal struggle represents the clash of the forces of modern alienation and Christian morality with the ancient peasant affinity with natural processes, while Eustacia's fate represents the consequence of a wilful self-alienation from a powerful identification with nature. Together they experience the havoc wreaked by the sexual instinct and its power to set reason at naught. Their final destruction is brought about by Clym's allegiance to Christian morality and by his repudiation of peasant fatalism in favour of a doctrine of sin as a source of suffering. Hardy controls this complicated interplay of different values by using the cycles of nature myths as a structural device within which Clym's and Eustacia's tragedy unfolds.

The cycle begins at the November bonfire, when Eustacia creates Damon Wildeve "out of chaos," conjuring him by the light of her fire, as she did the year before. Her lover's name suggests the demons of

Walpurgis night, and most of his appearances in the novel are by fire- or lantern- or moonlight.[9] Damon is Clym's dark twin, the winter king, and a rival for Eustacia's love. Clym Yeobright arrives home, appearing "like a man from heaven" near December 21, the date of the winter solstice, and Eustacia first sees him on Christmas Day when Clym strikes his head against a sprig of mistletoe as he bears food and wine to his guests (p. 166).[10] Into this pivotal scene Hardy introduces the mummers' play which, as Hardy well knew, is a somewhat garbled but still recognizable dramatization of the central rite of nature myths, the sacrifice and rebirth of the god at the time of the winter solstice.[11] Clym is destined to become Eustacia's summer king, and he quickly and dramatically replaces Damon in her affections.

Clym's modern alienation and self-consciousness are eased by renewed contact with Egdon, but his marriage to Eustacia near the summer solstice marks the beginning of his eclipse. In midsummer time Damon and the mysterious Diggory Venn, who haunts Egdon like a nature spirit, gamble for the gold which would reunite Clym and his mother, and Venn's mistake contributes to Clym's and Mrs. Yeobright's further estrangement, while indirectly enriching Wildeve (pp. 271-278).

Hardy illustrates Clym's waning potency by his symbolic relationship to the sun.[12] Clym suffers from eyestrain brought on by overstudy and he becomes over-sensitive to sunlight. Cut off from his attempt at self education, Clym turns back to Egdon, where he begins to be absorbed into the landscape, as the body of the god-king was returned to the earth to make it fertile (pp. 294, 298). Clym is branded by the sun, marked by the god as an intended sacrifice. The

summer king's day has passed and the winter king is on the ascendancy. Wildeve inherits money, becomes a father, and regains Eustacia's esteem; he is "placed in the sunshine," while Clym is "purblind" (pp. 334, 354-355).

Mrs. Yeobright is inadvertently sacrificed to the sun by Eustacia, whose face is compared to a cow-mask worn by the Egdon peasants, which possibly was used in pagan rites celebrating the goddess as the divinity of cattle fertility.[13] As she is dying beneath the "merciless" sun, Mrs. Yeobright hears male grasshoppers calling for mates, "to show that amid the prostration of the larger animal species an unseen insect world was busy in all the fulness of life" (pp. 339, 342-343). The cycles of birth and death continue about her, unconscious of, and unresponsive to, her pain. It is therefore ironic that his mother's death shocks Clym out of his progressive reabsorption into the Egdon landscape by introducing the Christian concept of sin and its attendant guilt.

Clym is convinced that he has sinned because of his failure to seek his mother's forgiveness for having married against her wishes, while he was in the grip of a powerful sexual attraction. He longs for escape from the sun, for he feels that his acts have cut him off from any right to the light (pp. 367-368). The continued estrangement of Clym and his mother which contributes to her death is due to a series of misunderstandings and accidents, for which Clym insists on claiming responsibility. Because of his concern with human responsibility for suffering Clym is unable to accept Mrs. Yeobright's death as a part of the nature of things. Furthermore, he mistakenly believes Eustacia to

be guilty of the sin of deliberate cruelty, motivated by a desire to indulge her illicit passion for Wildeve (p. 388). Clym makes what Hardy perceives as the "mistake" of Christian metaphysics by trying to explain human misfortune, which results from chance and from the indifference of nature, as punishment for sin, and imposing an inappropriate system of moral values on unconscious natural cycles.

However, self-alienated from his place in nature, Clym finds that Christianity is a creed of dubious comfort:

> But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled . . . he did not maintain long. It is usually so. . . . Human beings, in their generous endeavour to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own; and, even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears. (p. 455)

This is for Hardy the central problem of Christian metaphysics, for if suffering is decreed by an omniscient and omnipotent God, then that Being, in Hardy's opinion, is immoral. The "excuse" of human sin is to Hardy an unsatisfactory and unworthy attempt at justification.

The mythic cycle is completed by the death of Clym's rival and twin, Wildeve, on November 6, a year and a day after the opening of the novel. But Clym's intrusive sense of sin has disrupted the normal pattern, and Eustacia, driven to despair by Clym's rejection of her, dies also (pp. 391, 421-422). Thus, at the novel's end, Eustacia, the voluptuous aspect of the goddess, Mrs. Yeobright, the motherly aspect,

and Wildeve, the demonic winter king, are all dead. Only the maidenly Thomasin, and Clym, the summer king who has rejected his role and outlived his time, remain. Clym becomes a pallid secular Christ, delivering a sermon from atop prehistoric Rainbarrow. He takes as his text the story of a Biblical king who passionately loved a voluptuous woman, and who betrayed his vow of filial piety to his mother (pp. 484-485). But the mother whom Clym has betrayed is not merely Mrs. Yeobright; she is also the goddess of nature to whose worship Clym cannot return. His Christian concern with sin alienates him from her, and from his proper role in the furtherance of her cycles. Clym ends as an impotent figure whose lectures on "morally unimpeachable subjects" are tolerated by, rather than inspiring to, the Egdon peasants. Clym becomes the object of their tolerant loving-kindness because of his sad history. Such compassion is the only possible melioration of the calamities of his life (p. 485).

Hardy intended originally to end the novel at the completion of the cycle of a year and a day, but the demands of a Victorian audience for a "happy ending" compelled him to add Book Sixth, "Aftercourses" (p. 473n). However, Hardy was able to use this enforced catering to his audience's taste to augment rather than to dilute the theme of his novel by linking "Aftercourses" with the mythic cycle on which the first five books are based. Hardy accomplishes this by a transformation of the character Diggory Venn, whom Hardy intended to disappear mysteriously, and whose role in the first five books is that of a nature spirit who is closely identified with Egdon. In Book Sixth, however, Venn becomes a dairy farmer, like Gabriel Oak a participant in

meliorative agricultural activities. Diggory's apotheosis from mysterious, fey spirit of Egdon to successful and responsible farmer occurs at Christmas, for he is the new summer king (p. 457). Venn begins to court Thomasin on the eve of May Day when the Egdon peasants set up a May pole on the green in front of her house. The May tree was regarded as a charm to promote fertility in women and in cattle, and the May Day celebrations were remnants of ancient religious rites in honour of the goddess of fertility.[14] Hardy clearly recognizes the pagan origin of these rites and sees them as an affirmation of values which are opposed to those of Christianity:

> . . . the symbolic customs which tradition has attached to each season of the year were yet a reality on Egdon. Indeed, the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets is pagan still: in these spots homage to nature, self-adoration, . . . rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, seem in some way or other to have survived mediaeval doctrine. (p. 459)

Whereas Clym avoids the May celebrations, Venn uses the occasion to seek out Thomasin and encounters her at the foot of the May pole. The marriage of Diggory and Thomasin represents an affirmation of pagan values of cyclic renewal which contrasts with Clym's self-imposed Christian ascetism arising from his sense of sin:

> 'How can I have the conscience to marry after having driven two women to their deaths?'
> ' . . . God has set a mark upon me which wouldn't look well in a love-making scene.' (pp. 472-473)

Thomasin takes Diggory as her husband and the seasonal festivals of Egdon continue despite Clym's alienation from them (p. 482). Creeds come and go, but the fertility of the land and the necessity to participate in its processes endure. The fertility of the soil, like the conventions of society, requires an active participation by individuals with the courage to endure what cannot be altered and the good will and loving-kindness to alleviate those problems which are susceptible of melioration. Those individuals, like Clym, who cannot accept the necessary role played by death and suffering in the continuance of the natural world, and who try to assign responsibility for these unpleasant realities to human sin, thereby sacrifice their limited meliorative capacity. One of Hardy's main criticisms of orthodox Victorian Christianity is that, far from meliorating the human condition, its tenets actually increase the misery of the human lot, by adding the burden of guilt to unhappy and unavoidable situations. In The Mayor of Casterbridge Hardy explores the corollary of this sin and guilt, the Christian doctrine of atonement.

(ii)

In the The Mayor of Casterbridge Hardy returns to several of the themes and devices of The Return of the Native. As in The Return of the Native there is a pair of men competing for the sexual favours of a woman, as the god and his supplanter compete for the goddess. The goddess is also represented by a trio of women, the motherly Susan, the desirable Lucetta, and the maidenly Elizabeth Jane. The hag, that aspect of the goddess which became the furies of classical Greece, is represented by Mrs. Goodenough, who appropriately is the instrument by which Michael Henchard's past overtakes him. As in The Return of the Native, the protagonist's fate follows the cycle of nature myths and is linked by solar imagery to the god of natural fertility. Henchard and Farfrae are the twins and rivals of nature myth. However, whereas Michael is a strong, warm sun, Farfrae is only a moon, a pale modern reflection of Henchard's peasant vigour and vitality. Appropriately, these gods of the corn are both grain merchants; they appear to Elizabeth Jane as "two grains of corn."[15] However, this identity is belied by fundamentally different attitudes towards the traditional way of Casterbridge life. When the two men arrange rival festivities for the townspeople Michael chooses to hold his at a prehistoric earthwork and offers traditional games and contests. Farfrae, instead, holds a ball in a cathedral constructed of trees and rick cloths, a woodland shrine turned to a modern social purpose. Despite Michael's fidelity,

the sun deserts him and his affair is rained out while Farfrae's is an enormous success. Henchard sets out to ruin Farfrae in business, but the mana (the favour of the god towards his human representative) has passed from him to the younger man. On the strength of the weather prophet's prediction of a bad harvest, Michael buys corn so recklessly that he runs into debt and is forced to sell at a loss while the weather continues fine. However, this loss of faith in prophecy is his undoing, for the sun ultimately withdraws and the harvest is ruined (pp. 118-122, 210-216).

The climax of this rivalry occurs when Michael challenges Farfrae to fight in a loft above the corn store. Farfrae, his face warmed and coloured by the sun, is almost killed before Michael relents in memory of the love he once bore towards the younger man. The encounter leaves Michael emasculated and despairing, for this is the final transfer of the god's favour from the old king to the new (pp. 312-316). However, Farfrae is a disrupter, not a perpetuator, of tradition. His moonlike coolness and his introduction of modern entertainments and mechanized farm equipment mark him as the harbinger of a new world which endangers the traditional cycles of Casterbridge life.

For to an even greater extent than The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge is also concerned with the alienating effects of modern thought on traditional Wessex life. The country town of Casterbridge is the site of an early incursion into Wessex of the forces of education and modernity which will contribute to the destruction of the traditional peasant life. However, there is an essential difference between Clym Yeobright and Michael Henchard, for

while in Clym this conflict of ancient and modern is internalized, Michael never loses his affinity with the natural world. A skilled farm worker who becomes a corn merchant, Michael carries into town life his peasant superstitions, attitudes and values. Casterbridge is a suitable background for Michael, for its sole raison d'être is to provide a market for the exchange of farm produce and manufactured farm implements. Hardy repeatedly emphasizes Casterbridge's physical continuity with the surrounding countryside and with its own historic and prehistoric past (pp. 31, 80-82):

> Casterbridge was the complement of the rural life around; not its urban opposite. Bees and butterflies in the cornfields at the top of the town, who desired to get to the meads at the bottom . . . flew straight down High Street. . . . in autumn airy spheres of thistledown floated into the same street, . . . and stole through people's doorways into their passages with a hesitating scratch on the floor, like the skirts of timid visitors. (p. 65)

Farfrae is an intruder into this environment, a displaced Scot who sings sentimental ballads of a homeland to which he intends never to return. It is he who introduces into Casterbridge modern farm machinery and business methods (pp. 58-62, 191-194). Thus Michael becomes a symbol of the old Casterbridge life and the natural processes to which it is attuned, and Farfrae represents the forces of alienating modern life and thought. Their rivalry in love and business, the struggle between the old pastoral king and his successor, becomes the clash of the traditional values of old Wessex with those of the alienating

nineteenth century. Christianity plays a role in this clash by intoducing into the old Wessex milieu a concern for sin and atonement, which undermines the integrity of the peasant pagan-Christian compromise and leaves it vulnerable to the forces of alienation.

In general, formal Christianity has no more relevance to the life of the transplanted country folk of Casterbridge than it does to that of the Egdon peasants (pp. 96-97, 267). Michael's faith is a typical jumble of half understood Christian theology and peasant fatalism which serves him well until he is confronted with the problem of sin and atonement. The issue of man's responsibility for sin and the possibilities of atonement are central to The Mayor of Casterbridge. In the fatalistic view of nature myths men sin and suffer the consequences of sin, but their sense of personal responsibility is minimized by their limited freedom of choice. Since much of human sin results from necessity, from the manipulation of the forces which order the universe, to attempt to rectify the situation, to atone completely for the past and make all as it was before, is in fact hubris.[16] It is beyond man's power to wipe clean the slate, just as it is beyond his ability fully to restore the spoiled corn: "Nature won't stand so much as that" (p. 53). Man is limited to a partial melioration of the results in the present of his past wrong doing; the past itself is beyond his ability to amend. Michael's symbolic gift of five guineas to Susan is an example of the Christian "illusion" of atonement, which rests in the belief that man is responsible for his own sins (p. 79).

Michael's Christian inheritance largely consists of a rather superstitious faith in a judgemental divinity, and he makes the same

mistake as Clym in regarding chance events as the manifestations of the conscious will of a deity preoccupied with sin and determined to punish it (p. 144). Nonetheless, Henchard tries to avoid public disclosure of his past wrong doing, thus bypassing one step of the Christian formula of penitence, confession, and expiation. Michael attempts to atone by restoring Susan to her rightful position as his wife, a gesture which the peasant Susan did not expect; she applies to Michael only for some help in meliorating her present difficulties. Michael's desire to atone springs not from genuine feeling, but from a sense of "strict mechanical rightness," the painful consequences of which he will endure to "castigate himself with the thorns which these restitutory acts brought in their train" (pp. 93-95). This Christian emphasis on penitence and expiation through suffering leads Michael to make a public confession when Mrs. Goodenough confronts him with his past. The furmity hag's revelation is the turning point of Michael's career: "On that day -- almost at that minute -- he passed the ridge of prosperity and honour, and began to descend rapidly on the other side" (p. 251).

However, it is not Henchard's relationship to Susan, but his former liaison with Lucetta which turns him into an outcast. For the sins of Lucetta and Henchard are violations of the Victorian sexual code for which their society demands to the full the Christian act of penitence and public acknowledgement of guilt. Furthermore, the purely arbitrary social standards of this code govern the characters' views of what constitutes appropriate atonement for past wrong doing. The Victorians considered marriage of the sinners as the universal solution to irregular sexual relationships, or even the scandalous suggestion of

such a relationship. Consequently, Lucetta's motives in wishing to marry Michael are largely social and conventional: "'I ought to marry you for conscience' sake'" (p. 225). Elizabeth Jane, that "flower of Nature" who arose from a broken social law, unaware of her own illegitimacy, has an "almost vicious" love of propriety, and it is she who urges Lucetta to marry Michael after Susan's death. It is thus ironic that Elizabeth Jane becomes the voice of Victorian propriety since she is the living embodiment of "Nature's jaunty readiness to support unorthodox social principles" (pp. 248-249, 367-368). It is Lucetta's decision not to atone for her sexual lapse in the conventional manner by marrying Henchard which exposes her to public disgrace.

Hardy emphasizes that the sexual "sinners" of The Mayor of Casterbridge are essentially innocent. Susan, in her simplicity, imagines that her relationship with Newson is legally binding. The scandal which arose around Henchard's and Lucetta's relationship in Jersey was the result of carelessness of appearances rather than actual wrong doing. However, Michael points out that "'it is not by what is . . . but by what appears that [one is] judged'" by society (pp. 90-91, 203). When Michael takes pity on Lucetta and attempts to return her compromising letters, this act of humanity leads to public exposure, the shock of which kills Lucetta and her unborn child. Hardy makes very clear that the moral indignation of the mob which exposes Lucetta's and Michael's sins is highly suspect, for they are drunkards, poachers, and thieves (pp. 289-290, 293-296). Thus the possibility of melioration of the natural grief a sexual rivalry entails is

forestalled by the self-righteous Victorian sexual morality which has no relationship to the real qualities either of those who suffer under it or those who enforce it.

At the end of the novel, Michael, financially ruined by his contest with Farfrae, and publicly disgraced by the revelations of his past, retreats to the countryside around Casterbridge. His life has come full circle and he dresses in the countryman's clothes of his youth. Finally outcast even from Elizabeth Jane's love, Henchard lies in the sunlight amid the autumn stubble, the nature god returning his body to the earth from which it came. His attempts at atonement have been thwarted by "the ingenious machinery contrived by the Gods for reducing human possibilities of melioration to a minimum," and by the cruelty of Victorian conventions which negate even this tiny meliorative capacity (pp. 360, 366, 369).

Henchard turns towards Egdon, which stretches like the body of the goddess beneath the sky. Here he finds shelter in a hut made of earth, where he is cared for by the loving-kindness of a simple-minded rustic whose mother was once the object of Michael's charity. Michael's will is a complete rejection of the society which has cast him out and of the rites of the Christian orthodoxy whose tenets contributed to his ruin. Henchard returns to the Mother and to the simple loving-kindness which is the only melioration open to man amid the chances and hazards of his life (pp. 381-384).

In The Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbridge, therefore, Hardy presents two threats to the pagan-Christian compromise achieved by Gabriel Oak. One is an overconcern with Christian concepts

of sin and atonement which is incompatible with peasant fatalism. The other is the disruptive influence of nineteenth century alienation. Clym Yeobright is prevented by his concern with sin from returning from modern alienation to the full participation in natural processes represented by the worship of the goddess. Michael's attempts to resist the forces of alienation and to retain his full allegiance to the natural world while fulfilling Christian rituals of atonement result in his total rejection of and by a modern society which holds no place for him. An arbitrary set of sexual conventions is the mechanism by which his rejection is achieved.

In succeeding novels contemporary sexual mores play a central role in the alienation of man from nature and from faith. In The Woodlanders and Tess of the d'Urbervilles the god and goddess of nature myth are sacrificed on the altar of Victorian sexual convention, in a world in which the forces of alienation grow ever more powerful. The triumph of Christian values over pagan tradition, however, is shortlived. Once cut off from the spiritual resources of participation in the natural world, Christianity itself succumbs to nineteenth century alienation. Characters who attempt to return to their former place in nature find that the natural world is no longer, like that of the myth, an order governed by necessity in which man has a limited but significant role. The natural world becomes a place ruled by chance, unconscious of, and indifferent to, human participation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1 Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 17; hereafter cited in text.

2 The god-king sometimes acted as both sacrifice and celebrant, dedicating and ritually immolating himself. See Joseph Campbell, Primitive Mythology, Vol. I of The Masks of God, 2nd. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 165-166.

3 John Paterson, "The Return of the Native as Anti-Christian Document," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 14 (1959), 118.

4 Bryn W. Caless, "Hardy's Characters and the Significance of Their Names," The Thomas Hardy Yearbook, (1974), p.13.

5 James Frazer, The Golden Bough (1922; rpt. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), pp. 812ff.

6 Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 81.

7 Robert Graves, The White Goddess, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961), p. 48.

8 Paterson, p. 111.

9 Walpurgis Night or May Eve was the occasion of an important fertility rite which survived in the Christian era as a sabbath celebrated by British witches. The date thus has strong sexual and demonic associations. See Frazer, p. 720, and Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. 1, p. 197; The White Goddess, p. 168.

10 Mistletoe in Druid fertility rites represents the genitals of the nature god, and today its sexual associations remain in Christian solstitial customs. See Graves, The White Goddess, p. 65.

11 Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 135. Hardy is regarded as "an expert in the folk play tradition." A careful examination of Hardy's version of the Saint George play reveals that Hardy interpolated lines of his own into the traditional material which greatly increased the coherence and dramatic value of the play. See Michael J. Preston, "The British Folk Plays and Thomas Hardy: a computer aided study," Southern Folklore Quarterly, 40 (1977), 159-182. This is typical of Hardy's use of folklore in his novels. Hardy has a "niche among the Victorian

antiquarians and folklorists," but he adapted his knowledge to suit his artistic needs: "as a creature whose life was imbued with and regulated by the lore of his region," Hardy found that "his imagination was free to work upon material thoroughly familiar to him for a lifetime." Betty Rich Lombardi, "Thomas Hardy's Collecting Techniques and Sources for the Folklore in his Wessex Novels," Midwestern Journal of Language and Folklore, 2 (1976), pp. 20-21, 26.

12 The importance of the sun in timing agricultural cycles, particularly in northern latitudes, led to an identification of the fertility god with the sun, although the Neolithic people of Britain were not actually sun worshippers. See Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. 1, p. 14.

13 Graves, Greek Myths, Vol.1, pp. 192, 223.

14 Frazer, pp. 137, 162.

15 Thomas Hardy, The Mayor of Casterbridge (London: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 66, 201; hereafter cited in text.

16 An example of hubris based on the mistaken assumption that it is within man's ability to compensate for a sinful act which has been ordained by necessity is Oedipus' unwitting curse against himself as the murderer of Laius. Graves, Greek Myths, Vol. 2, p. 10.

CHAPTER IV

The Twilight of the Gods:

The Woodlanders

and

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

(i)

In The Woodlanders, as in Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, and The Mayor of Casterbridge, the male protagonist is linked to the natural world by the myth of the dying and reborn god of nature. Giles Winterborne is the summer king of fertility myth, who is born in the heart of winter, at the time of the December solstice. He is a fruit god of the orchard, a tree god of the forest:

> He looked and smelt like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit-stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples . . . [1]

> He rose upon her memory as the fruit-god and the wood-god in alternation: sometimes leafy and smeared with green lichens . . . sometimes cider stained and starred with apple-pips . . . (p. 291)

Giles migrates with the seasons from forest to orchard and back again in an endless cycle of husbandry. His relationship to nature is similar to that of Gabriel Oak. Giles is a meliorator, a careful and responsible adapter to human use of natural processes. There is, however, an important difference between Gabriel and Giles. Gabriel is concerned with cultivated land in which the fertility god and goddess of the agriculturalists have an ancient and well established presence, and where human efforts to meliorate natural indifference have met with the greatest success. Giles is a woodlander, whose environment admits of only very limited melioration. Gardens will not grow in this wood (p. 167) and man is everywhere reminded that nature unadorned is indifferently cruel and mindlessly competitive:

> Owls that had been catching mice . . . rabbits that had been eating the winter-greens in the gardens, and stoats that had been sucking the blood of the rabbits . . . discreetly withdrew from publicity . . . (p. 55)

> The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling. (p. 82)

> They halted beneath a half-dead oak, hollow and disfigured with white tumours, its roots spreading like claws to grasp the ground. (p. 231)

> Next were more trees . . . wrestling for existence, their branches disfigured with wounds resulting from their mutual rubbings and blows. (p. 323)

Giles and Marty are wise in the ways of this natural world, and are able to exercize a very limited meliorative capacity because they recognize that events "which had . . . a touch of the uncanny, and even of the supernatural, were simply occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew" (p. 340). This is the fatalism of nature myth which sees the natural order as a cycle of inexorable laws without moral purpose; because they neither romanticize nature nor seek to find a hidden moral purpose in it, Giles and Marty are able to survive in peace with the natural world.

Like Gabriel, Clym, and Michael Henchard, Giles has a supplanter, a dark twin, in his case, Fitzpiers. These twins become increasingly alienated in successive Hardy novels as the struggle between the values of Old Wessex and those of modern nineteenth century England becomes more acute. Troy, although he neglects his duty, has a definite role as a Wessex farmer; Wildeve, although trained as an engineer, returns to Egdon and takes part in some of its traditions; Farfrae rejects many of the values of Old Wessex and ushers the modern age into Casterbridge. Fitzpiers is a completely alienated nineteenth century man. He is an interloper into the seasonal activities of the forest, an out of place, tropical growth. He is largely oblivious to the woods, and he hates to find himself alone in them. He is an inexpert horseman. Faced with the mystery of John South's spiritual link with a great tree, Fitzpiers subjects the world of myth to examination with a microscope (pp. 80, 141, 150, 156, 222).

Fitzpiers and Giles become rival worshippers at Grace's temple, and as winter passes into spring Fitzpiers steadily supplants Giles in

Grace's thoughts (p. 165). On Midsummer Eve the village girls enter an oak and holly grove to enact an old ritual, and it is here that Fitzpiers claims Grace as his own. However, since Grace is a young lady educated in middle class Victorian sexual conventions, Fitzpiers consummates the rite with the less inhibited peasant, Suke Damson, in a hayfield, by the light of the Midsummer's Eve moon (pp. 166-173).

Like Fitzpiers, the "Olympian" Felice Charmond, the presiding divinity of Little Hintock, is a stranger to the woods, which she hates and fears, and she neglects her duty as their overseer. This neglect ultimately leads to the ruin of her own happiness, when, as a result of Giles' financial losses, Grace marries Fitzpiers instead of her old friend (pp. 70, 76-77, 219, 251). Mrs. Charmond is a rapidly aging Venus, fond of odalisque poses, the artificial atmosphere of the boudoir, and the flattering light of rose-shaded lamps, which dwindles when sunlight is admitted to her room. Her house is set in a damp, unhealthy hollow of luxuriant vegetation, and is overgrown with lichen, moss, ivy, and creepers (pp. 207-208, 219, 87-88). This steamy hot-house atmosphere typifies Mrs. Charmond and her sexual relationship with Fitzpiers. For Felice's and Fitzpier's alienation from nature is linked to their self indulgent sensuality. Hardy protests against the Victorian attempt to deny the power of sexuality as a force of nature, because of the unhappiness in which such denial results, but he has no admiration for the untrammelled self indulgence of the sexual appetite which increases rather than alleviates misery. Giles is a far less alienated man than Fitzpiers, but he is also far more sexually self controlled. Hardy very clearly makes the point that Giles and Grace are

not people of large sexual appetite (p. 325). Their suffering results from a denial of natural sexual intimacy as a part of their love, not from a wish to indulge in the selfish passions of the over civilized, hot-house Felice and Fitzpiers. We are thus invited to compare the two sets of lovers, and to observe that the person who is most in tune with natural processes, Giles, is also the one who is most capable of meliorating the unavoidable havoc wreaked by the sexual instinct, by loving consideration of the consequences of his actions to the loved one (p. 291). Similarly, in Far From the Madding Crowd, Gabriel's steadfast tenderness is opposed to the selfishness of the sexually fascinating Troy, and in Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy contrasts Angel's self-restraint in the face of the milk-maids united adoration with the havoc resulting from Alec's self indulgence among his work people.

Thus the sexual fascination which Fitzpiers exerts over Grace is essentially unhealthy (pp. 181, 186). After marriage, propinquity and lack of mutual respect and sympathy quickly erode this fascination, and when Fitzpiers becomes involved with Felice, Grace once again turns to Giles. The pivotal point in this relationship occurs when, by the light of the setting sun, Fitzpiers rides away from Grace through an abundant Autumn landscape, "the supreme moment of [nature's] bounty," and a moment later, Giles approaches like a nature god "of undiluted manliness . . . arisen out of the earth." Grace with relief sheds her conventional middle class artificiality in a momentary reversion to "the crude country girl of her latent early instincts" (pp. 224-225).

Within Grace and Giles this healthy and natural love and its

accompanying sexual desire clash with orthodox morality. Grace, as her name suggests, in many ways typifies the Christian virtues of modesty, forebearance, and filial obedience. Yet her virtues are negated in part by her adherence to the social values of Victorian Christian orthodoxy, in her concern not merely for sexual "purity," but, less admirably, for the public appearance of purity. She is most appealing when she puts compassion and loving-kindness above her concern for her reputation: "I have been wicked -- I have thought too much of myself. . . . I cannot bear that you should suffer so," and, "*I don't mind what they say or what they think of us any more*" (p. 321). Giles Winterborne becomes the victim of the clash of the natural sexual passion and Victorian Christian orthodoxy. Giles responds to the conflict between his desires and the letter of Victorian orthodoxy with a genuine charity which is in keeping with his role as a meliorator. His desire to meliorate Grace's ambivalent position leads him to acquiesce in her wish to observe the sexual proprieties. However, the uncharitable intransigence of Victorian society in sexual matters ultimately destroys Giles.

Hardy emphasizes that Giles' and Grace's problems with Christian orthodoxy are social, and not theological. After Fitzpiers elopes with Felice, Grace begins to feel a spirit of "revolt . . . against social law" which continues to bind her to her unworthy husband, and she accepts Giles' tentative love-making with true loving-kindness. However, although Grace no longer feels morally bound to Fitzpiers, she wishes to "keep the proprieties as well as I can," a wish to which Giles conforms out of love for her (pp. 226, 294-295). Giles feels free to love Grace as long as he believes her divorce to be legally

possible. It is only when he learns that Grace is indissolubly bound by law to Fitzpiers that the immensity of his "social sin" overwhelms him (p. 303). When Grace turns to Giles to hide her from the returning Fitzpiers, his steadfast love shelters her, although "social law had negatived forever" the possibility of their union (p. 316). In a woodland retreat where their natural surroundings "knew neither law nor sin," Grace and Giles play out to their logical conclusion the ludicrous demands of Victorian propriety, which exist in opposition to the dictates of both reason and loving-kindness, and which culminate in Giles' death from exposure. Giles' fantastic self-immolation on the altar of Victorian prudery leaves the natural world bereft of its god (pp. 317, 336). In The Woodlanders, therefore, Hardy clearly distinguishes between the natural law which governs sexuality and the social law which dictates Victorian sexual mores. That natural law may be mindlessly cruel is vividly illustrated by the silent, terrible struggle of the woodland. Giles is able to meliorate this cruelty and to live in harmony and peace with nature because of his frank assessment and careful adaptation of nature's amoral processes. Hardy advocates similar frankness and care in the design of social conventions to meliorate the unavoidable sorrows which result from the operation of sexual instinct. Christianity's denial of man's place in nature, which involves a repudiation of the force of the sexual drive, aids in the process of alienation from a sense of participation in the continuance of the natural world which once provided man with one of his major spiritual resources. As a result, Christianity is unable to stand alone against the combined onslaught of natural drives which

oppose its "artificial" morality, and the doubts which are engendered by what Hardy perceives as its metaphysical "inconsistencies." The resultant loss of faith leaves Hardy characters completely alienated from both the Christian God and nature, psychically and spiritually disoriented and despairing. Tess of the d'Urbervilles illustrates the struggle to resist the alienation from nature which is brought about in part by the Christian denial of man's participation in cycles of birth, procreation, and death.

(ii)

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy gathers together the many uses to which he put nature myths in his previous novels.[2] As in Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, these myths are used to suggest man's role as a participant in natural cycles, and to illustrate the spiritual, moral, and emotional hazards attendant upon abandoning that place. Like Clym Yeobright and Michael Henchard, Tess is faced with the loss of the consolations offered by traditional peasant fatalism as a result of modern alienation and Christian concern with sin. As in the case of Clym, much of the conflict is internalized in Tess's psyche. However, in Tess of the d'Urbervilles more than in any other novel in which Hardy employs narrative structure and symbolism drawn from nature myths, there exists a high degree of tension between the characters' roles as figures of mythic significance, and as individuals who are often in conflict with their society.[3] This is particularly apparent in the character of Tess, who not only represents the goddess as maiden, lover, and witch, but who is also a fully realized and appealing individual. Both as an individual and as a figure from myth, Tess, like Giles Winterborne, is sacrificed to an unreasonable and uncharitable sexual code. As an individual Tess is sacrificed first to Alec's self-indulgent lechery, and secondly to Angel's prudery. Victorian society fails to mediate

between these poles, because it does not meliorate the natural cruelty of the unrestrained sexual instinct by a compassionate moral code. Tess's final sacrifice at Stonehenge represents the death of the goddess, and the loss of the mythic world view, for Victorian sexual mores are symptomatic of the general denial of man's place in nature. Tess's vibrant sexuality represents the last link which man possesses with the natural world,[4] the last process in which human participation favours the perpetuation of nature's order. The Victorian Christian attempt to control rather than to meliorate natural processes elevates the prevailing sexual conventions into religious dogma, and damns as sinners those individuals who are unable to oppose the fierce tide of sexuality which nature uses to accomplish its purposes. Thus there exists in Tess of the d'Urbervilles a clear polarization of values between the natural, sexually realistic, meliorative world of the myth, which is represented by the "goddess" Tess, and the alienated, sexually unrealistic, nature controlling attitude of the Victorian society within which Tess suffers as an individual.

Hardy makes clear Tess's role as a divinity who represents the natural world by linking her life with the history of the goddess as maiden, lover and hag, and with the cycles of the seasons which this myth represents. Throughout the novel Tess is linked with the landscape and ancient customs of Wessex. Her name means "carrying ears of corn" or "the reaper"[5] and like the goddess she represents, her sexual development follows the cycle of the seasons. Tess first appears in the fresh beauty of her maidenhood, at the springtime of the year, clothed in white, the goddess's colour, and carrying white flowers and a willow

wand.[6] Hardy tells us that this custom is a remnant of an old May festival in honour of the goddess of corn fertility.[7] Tess loses her virginity in the Chase, "one of the few remaining woodlands in England of undoubted primaeval date, wherein Druidical mistletoe was still found on aged oaks" (pp. 42-43), in a re-enactment of an ancient custom according to which a girl sacrificed her maidenhood to the goddess by submitting to the first man who came upon her in the sacred grove, even if he were a criminal or a madman.[8] This is the first instance in which Tess appears as a sacrificial victim.

It is in the lush valley of the Froom that Tess enters into her voluptuous womanhood, as she encounters Angel Clare in the midsummer month in the fecund, overgrown garden at Talbothays (pp. 157-161). As they walk together through the midsummer dawn Clare calls Tess Artemis and Demeter (p. 167) and throughout the idyll at Talbothays Tess is associated with the goddess by these classical names. She is also linked to nature myths by her association with the sun. It is on "This Sun's-day, when flesh went forth to coquet with flesh while hypocritically affecting business with spiritual things" that Clare first takes Tess in his arms (p. 181). Angel tells Tess that she is like sea foam warmed by the sun, a reference to Aphrodite (p. 185). Tess, newly arisen from her mid-day nap, is sun burned and sun warmed, rich with sensuality: "The brim-fulness of her nature breathed from her. It was a moment when a woman's soul is more incarnate than at any other time; when the most spiritual beauty bespeaks itself flesh; and sex takes the outside place in the presentation." As Clare embraces Tess, her face, hair, and body are bathed in sunlight and warmth, and

she regards Angel "as Eve at her second waking [i.e. after her sexual initiation] might have regarded Adam" (pp. 217-218).[9] Tess's sexual maturity is thus associated with images of natural warmth and light, and with the goddess as the divinity of sexual love and natural fertility.

In sharp contrast, it is in the heart of winter that Angel deserts Tess and she lies beneath a sprig of mistletoe contemplating suicide, a second instance of her role as a sacrificial victim (p. 305). Tess is still involved in natural cycles, but her background becomes the wintry sterility of Flintcomb-Ash. Because Angel has rejected Tess for her sexual "sin," she attempts rigorously to suppress and deny her sexuality, only to be rebuked by the phallus shaped flints thrown up by the hard and grudging soil of Flintcomb-Ash, a reminder that winter's sterility passes naturally into spring and that it is an unavoidable but transitory part of the cycle. When Tess returns home to help her widowed mother, whose destitution leads Tess back to Alec, she plunges into "the chilly equinoctial darkness" of the Blackmore Vale, haunted by the witches and fairies of outlawed paganism (pp. 440-441). Having entered the world of witches and magic, Tess becomes the hag of nature myth, that aspect of the goddess to whom her erstwhile son and lover is sacrificed. At home in Marlott, Tess fancies that she hears the ghostly d'Urberville coach. Ironically, it is her former seducer and future victim, Alec, the spurious d'Urberville, who tells her the legend of the coach:

> 'It is that this sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of the d'Urberville blood, and it is held to be of ill-omen to the one who hears it. . . . . One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her -- or she killed him -- I forget which.' (p. 452)

Later Tess encounters Alec in the Kingsbere Church, where he lies like an effigy atop her ancestor's tomb (pp. 464-465). Thus in her sexual evolution from maiden to mature woman to death-dealing witch, Tess reiterates the goddess's yearly cycle, against a Wessex landscape which passes from spring to summer to winter.

However, Tess has no male counterpart with the mythic stature of Gabriel Oak or Giles Winterborne. The nature god has died, and his surviving rival in the contest for the sexual favours of the goddess remains only in the alienated sensualist, Alec. Alec appears to be a stereotypical Victorian seducer, a moustachioed, cigar smoking dandy with a melodramatic swagger (pp. 44-45). His home is a nouveau riche merchant's idea of a country property, disguised as a working farm. His sensuality, like that of the equally alienated Fitzpiers, is self-indulgent and irresponsible. Alec also resembles Fitzpiers in that his sensuality is of the hot-house variety; he plies Tess with early greenhouse strawberries and roses (pp. 42-43, 46-47). When he eventually wins Tess back, Alec takes her to Sandbourne, a "fashionable watering-place" on the edge of Egdon heath: "On the very verge of that tawny piece of antiquity . . . [this] glittering novelty . . . had chosen to spring up" (p. 480). Despite his personal alienation, the

character of Alec fulfils his role in the mythic cycle: he impregnates Tess, is supplanted by a rival, returns to enjoy Tess's sexual favours, and ultimately becomes her victim. Alec thus participates in Tess's evolution from maiden to lover to hag.

Alec's rival for Tess's love is no longer a summer king such as Gabriel or Giles, but the equally alienated pseudo-pagan, Angel. In the character of Angel Clare, Hardy examines and rejects the pseudo-paganism of nineteenth century Hellenism, and emphasizes that a re-entry into a mythic oneness with nature is impossible for alienated nineteenth century man. Angel has lost his faith in Christian metaphysics, and he therefore attempts to find a code to live by in the values of classical Greek civilization. However, he embraces the intellectual ideals of ancient Greece without understanding or experiencing its underlying sense of inevitable order, and of man's limited ability to control his destiny. Angel retains the Christian concepts of man's free will and subsequent responsibility for sin, and of the dichotomy of life and death, joy and pain, and their equation with good and evil. For Christianity, having triumphed over myth and itself succumbed to nineteenth century alienation, leaves a residue of assumptions and attitudes which precludes reentry into the world envisioned by nature myths.

At Talbothays Angel's civilized, intellectually satisfying, but emotionally arid Hellenism is brought into contact with the cycles of rural life, in which he begins to find some relief for his alienation and modern melancholy (pp. 152-153). By participating in the traditional, cyclic activities of the dairy, Angel is exposed to the

meliorative fatalism of nature myth which underlies and informs classical civilization. However, Angel's regeneration is more difficult and less rewarding than a return to the mythic world view. For although Angel does achieve a post-mythic readmittance into the natural world which is impossible for Clym or for Jude, this rebirth is accomplished at great cost: the sacrifice of Tess and the loss of the view of man as a meaningful part of the natural order.

Angel remains alienated from the natural world as long as he is unable to accept its amorality and indifference to human concepts of sin, and the necessary part which death and suffering play in natural cycles. The painted hags frighten Angel because he cannot accept that the sorrow and decay which they represent are simply part of the universal cycle in which both he and Tess are caught, and he therefore attributes a conscious malignity to the accidental expression on their faces (pp. 276-277, 300). In attempting to ascribe his personal suffering to Tess's "sin" and in rejecting her, Angel is also denying the necessity to participate in all parts of the cycle, painful as well as joyous, because he wishes to control that which he may only meliorate.

For Angel's Hellenism fails to provide him with an adequate philosophy with which to deal with sexuality, just as it fails to deal with the problem of evil. These failures both stem from the retention of Christian values which are incompatible with the pagan attitudes which nineteenth century Hellenism ostensibly embraced. Although Angel sheds much of the metaphysics of Christianity, he retains its moral standards, in the Arnoldian compromise which Hardy rejects,[10] as

abandoning the spiritual consolations which Christianity provides to those who are capable of closing their eyes to its metaphysical "inconsistencies," while retaining its "unnatural" moral code. Angel's attempt to fill the vacancy left by his loss of faith in Christian metaphysics with the symbols of Greek classical mythology cannot succeed, for Angel cannot penetrate to the heart of the original nature myths while he retains his Christian fetish for virginity.[11] The patriarchal inversion which is manifested in Christianity elevated the sacrificial God to central importance and polarized the goddess into a duality of virgin-mother and sexual temptress. The need of a patriarchal society to control female sexuality, so that the paternity of each child might be clearly established, attached moral connotations of "good" and "evil" to the virginal-motherly and the sexual aspects of the goddess, and fragmented her ancient cyclic trinity into a dichotomous duality. Because of this dichotomy, Angel categorizes Tess first as a "fresh and virginal daughter of Nature," and secondly as an impure sinner: "The woman I have been loving is not you. . . . But. . . . Another woman in your shape," although, as Tess herself points out, she is always the same woman (pp. 155, 293, 429). In this she resembles the goddess who contains all aspects of femininity in one, and who represents, as maiden, nymph, and witch, the complementary parts played by birth, procreation and death in the amoral cycles of the natural world.

However, Hardy does not celebrate sex as a joyous return to communion with natural processes, since he regards unrestrained sexuality as a source of more anguish than joy. Here, as always, Hardy

advocates the exercise of reason and loving-kindness to compensate for the pain caused by nature's use of the sexual instinct. What Hardy rejects is Arnold's and Angel's attempt to control the body by the application of Christian morality. Instead Hardy advocates a frank admission of the power of sexuality, and a compassionate effort to meliorate its devastations. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles nature mindlessly uses sexual passion to drive individuals to fulfil its purpose, without regard for their happiness or ultimate good. The dairy maids at Talbothays exist in a ferment of sexuality which centres, ironically, on Angel Clare:

> They writhed feverishly under the oppressiveness of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's law -- an emotion which they had neither expected nor desired. . . . the torture was almost more than they could endure. . . . They recognized the futility of their infatuation, from the social point of view; its purposeless beginning; . . . its lack of everything to justify its existence in the eye of civilization (while lacking nothing in the eye of Nature) . . . (p. 187)

Angel must come to appreciate this difference between the dictates of nature and those of conventional Victorian morality, for nature is not a-moral order which corresponds to human ideas of "good" and "evil." In the purgatory of South America, Angel also realizes that the Arnoldian compromise by which he has judged Tess retains an inappropriate set of Christian sexual conventions (pp. 433-435).

Despite her strong association with natural processes and with pagan myths, Tess herself has acquiesced in Angel's judgement of her

"sin," never questioning but that "he knew everything" and that he is fit to be her judge (p. 409). For although in her role as the representative of the goddess of nature, Tess is intimately associated with the continuity and amorality of natural processes, as an individual she, like Clare, is exposed to the dangers of alienation, and is confused by the moral valuations Christianity places on sexual behaviour. Tess's world is being invaded by the forces of alienation and altered by the fragmentation of the rural community. Tess and her mother belong to different centuries and the girl is beginning to feel the first twinges of the self-consciousness which is so destructive of natural beauty and harmony (pp. 23-24, 33-34, 134). Tess, however, resists these alienating influences to the best of her ability. It is to nature, and to her traditional role as a participant in agricultural cycles, that Tess turns for consolation after her seduction and pregnancy. She finds a balm for her suffering when she rejoins the communal activities of her village at harvest time and she becomes "part and parcel of outdoor nature," embracing the corn like a lover, beneath the benign gaze of a god-like sun (pp. 109-111). Two factors contribute to Tess's regeneration; the tolerant compassion of the peasant harvesters, and her renewed intimacy with nature presided over by the beaming sun god:

> His present aspect . . . explained all the old-time heliolatries in a moment. One could feel that a saner religion had never prevailed under the sky. The luminary was a golden-haired, beaming, mild-eyed, God-like creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth which was brimming

with interest for him. (p. 109)

In this environment filled with warmth, light and charity, Tess draws comfort from the pagan belief that, whatever her individual misfortunes, they form part of a great cycle which endures unconscious of her sufferings:

> The past was past; whatever it had been it was no more at hand. Whatever its consequences, time would close over them; they would all in a few years be as if they had never been, and she herself grassed down and forgotten: Meanwhile the trees were just as green as before; the birds sang and the sun shone as clearly now as ever. The familiar surroundings had not darkened because of her grief, nor sickened because of her pain. (p. 115)

This is an example of the comfort to be derived from the vision of man as a part of the natural order, without postulating consciousness of human sorrow on the part of natural forces. Such comfort is independent of what Hardy perceives as the Christian fallacy of a moral purpose which governs the natural world. Therefore, Tess's psychic wounds are healed by the kindly tolerance of her fellow labourers, by a fatalistic acceptance of past evil as irremediable, and by an attempt to meliorate her present circumstances by a return to useful participation in agricultural cycles.

However, at Talbothays, Tess's restored happiness is threatened by the serpent of modern alienation introduced by Angel Clare. Tess's comfortable sense of participation in immemorial cycles is undermined

by Clare's attempts to "educate" her, and it becomes instead a potential source of despair:

> ' . . . what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only -- finding out that there is set down in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall act her part; making me sad, that's all. The best is not to remember that your nature and your past doings have been just like thousands' and thousands' and that your coming life and doings'll be like thousands' and thousands'.' (p. 162)

The fatalism of nature worship accepts such endless repetition as a meaningful participation in the perpetuation of the earth's fertility. To one who, like Clare, is divorced both from Christian metaphysics and from the vision of nature myths, such determinism seems purposeless and demeaning, and it results in "the chronic melancholy which is taking hold of the civilized races with the decline of belief in a beneficent Power" (pp. 152-153). Tess tries to withstand this assault on her adherence to the vision of nature myth by resisting Angel's attempts to enlighten her: " 'Sometimes I feel I don't want to know anything more about it than I know already' " (p. 162).

However, although Tess is relatively successful at resisting the forces of alienating nineteenth century modernism, she finds a greater obstacle to happiness in the reaction of Victorian society towards her sexual lapse, and in her own ambivalent reponse to Christian attitudes to sexuality. Tess finds the fatalistic morality of her peasant community threatened by the Victorian Christian equation of violations of social mores with offenses against divine law. Tess's religious

beliefs, "apparently imbibed in childhood, were, if anything, Tractarian as to phraseology, and Pantheistic as to essence." Like Gabriel Oak, Tess's superficial observance of the forms of orthodoxy masks their irrelevance to beliefs which are "essentially naturalistic" (pp. 210-211). Tess is in this respect a typical Wessex peasant who has managed to accommodate a superficial Christian orthodoxy to the age old customs and attitudes which originally celebrated a god and goddess of natural fertility. However, as in the case of Giles Winterborne, Tess is placed in a situation in which this compromise is negated by the violent clash of Victorian orthodoxy with her sexual instinct, in which the necessity for confession, expiation and atonement conflicts with her desire to marry Angel Clare. Unlike Giles, Tess tries to oppose the prevailing morality with the fatalistic attitude of her mother. However, it is only with the greatest difficulty that Tess resists a conviction that her transgression of the sexual code is sinful and that she should expiate her sin by suffering. Thus, within Tess herself there exists a conflict of Victorian Christian concepts of sexual sin with the pagan fatalism towards sexual transgressions of the social code which is exemplified by Joan Durbeyfield (pp. 245-246).

The horrors preached by Victorian orthodoxy haunt Tess with visions of her unbaptised bastard tossed on the devil's pitchfork, an example of the Christian demand for suffering in the expiation of sin, no matter how inadvertent (pp. 117-118). However, in the restored warmth of the morning sun, Tess reasons that a Providence which would condemn her child is unworthy of her devotion (p. 120). Hardy draws a sharp contrast between the simple charity and psychic consolation of

Tess's experience in the sunlit field, and the lack of loving-kindness and spiritual comfort offered by Christianity. Her pathetic appeal to the vicar involves the man in a personal struggle beween charity and orthodoxy, an example of the situation which Hardy believes occurs too frequently, in which Christian dogma increases rather than meliorates the sum of human misery by placing conformity to the letter before observance of the spirit of loving-kindness. The vicar is moved by compassion to do violence to the official metaphysic by assuring Tess that her infant is not damned, but he refuses to challenge the social conventions by publicly burying the child himself (pp. 121-122). The vicar's strict adherence to social orthodoxy, despite his theological flexibility, illustrates the separation of the social and the spiritual functions of Christianity which is a constant theme in Tess of the d'Urbervilles.

Tess is disturbed initially more by the social than by the theological implications of her fallen state. Confronted by Christianity's prohibitive sexual morality and threats of damnation, Tess is momentarily shaken, but quickly rallies, convinced that these strictures are not of divine origin (pp. 101-102). Similarly, during her pregnancy, Tess is self-exiled from the village church because of the gossip and stares of her neighbours, by the social rather than the spiritual attitude of the community towards her condition. However, when she turns to the woods for comfort, Tess mistakes the moans and cries of unconscious nature for expressions of reproach for her sin, and she sees herself as a guilty intruder upon natural innocence (pp. 106-108). Her social qualms have led her to mistake natural

indifference for moral judgement, and she makes the Christian "mistake" of seeing moral purpose in unconscious processes:

> At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processess . . . until they seemed a part of her own story. . . . A wet day was an expression of irremediable grief at her weakness in the mind of some vague ethical being whom she could not definitely classify as the God of her childhood. . . . a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. . . . she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known in the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly. (p.108)

Later, Tess herself comes to realize that she is Angel's natural mate, and that the scruples which prevent her accepting him are social in origin (pp. 188-189). These scruples are finally swept aside by the power of sexuality: "The 'appetite for joy' which pervades all creation, that tremendous force which sways humanity to its purpose . . . was not to be controlled by vague lucubrations over the social rubric" (p. 244). Therefore Hardy makes clear the lesson which Angel must learn, and which Tess struggles to remember, that nature is indifferent to human sexual codes, and that there is an important difference between social codes and their metaphysical justifications.

Hardy emphasizes repeatedly that Tess's rebellion is against arbitrary sexual standards, which Victorian Christianity was used to

support, and not against imperishable ethical values. Tess is the living embodiment of all the virtues which the Bible attributes to a good woman (p. 338). Tess's morality is superior, not inferior, to that of social orthodoxy. For instance, she permits Angel the rite of courtship "for its own sweet sake," when a more conventionally venal girl might use her lover's passion to secure a home, a social position, and the security of the married state (p. 224).

Despite a superstitious dread that she is acquiring a happiness which she is too sinful to deserve, Tess accepts her peasant mother's advice to put the past behind her and to make a happy future for herself and for Angel, to accept the past fatalistically and to strive to meliorate the present. Unfortunately she is deceived by Angel's pseudo-paganism into revealing her past. Angel, however, is still bound by the Victorian Christian concept of promiscuity, at least on the part of women, as almost unforgiveable sin. Tess, out of mingled love, humility, and guilt, submits to Angel's judgement of her and becomes a model of Christian meekness and charity. At the moment when exploitation of her sexuality might win over Angel, Tess's submissiveness, and her acceptance of Angel's right to punish her for her "sin," actually increase his cruelty (pp. 308-314, 323-324).

Abandoned by Angel, Tess endures the frozen hell of Flintcomb-Ash uncomplainingly, imploring Angel by letter for forgiveness (pp. 428-430). However, at length the extravagance of her suffering causes Tess to rebel against Angel's right to punish her so severely. Tess returns to the pagan sense of the injustice of condemning man for sins of inadvertence over which he has limited or no control (p. 455).

Tess also rejects the Christian philosophy of ultimate restitution for temporal suffering and resolves that it is her reponsibility to meliorate the earthly condition of her family (p. 456). Tess becomes Alec's mistress to provide for her widowed mother and the younger children.

When Angel, made wise too late, returns to claim his wife, Tess is driven mad by grief and regret and she murders Alec in an insane attempt to secure Angel's forgiveness for her "sin": "'Angel, will you forgive me my sin against you, now that I have killed him? . . . It came to me as a shining light that I should get you back that way. I could not bear the loss of you any longer . . . '" (p. 492).

The "goddess" Tess thus completes the ancient cycle of the myth by the murder of one lover and a sexual idyll with her original mate in the heart of the New Forest. As an individual, Tess finally resolves her struggle against a Christian sense of sin and the modern doubt which threatens to alienate her from nature. This resolution occurs, appropriately, at the ancient British monument of Stonehenge, a temple to the comforting sun god of the harvest field (p. 503). Tess remembers that her mother's family once lived on Salisbury Plain, and she claims Stonehenge as her spiritual home, as she stretches herself on the sun-warmed altar stone. Her fate, in the shape of a police officer, overtakes her there, as the man appears out of the dawn beyond the sun stone (pp. 501-505). Tess has proclaimed her allegiance to the pagan world and reaffirmed her sexuality with her "natural" mate, but the price of adherence to such values, as the nineteenth century draws to a close, is extinction, for Tess as it was for Michael Henchard. As an

individual Tess is a victim driven to madness by a morality which increases rather than meliorates the natural cruelty of sexual desire, an insanity which leads to her execution by the very society which drove her mad. However, Tess's death also represents the loss of a mythic world from which Angel is forever debarred, in which all of human life, including death and generation, is seen as an important part of natural processes. On the day of Tess's execution, Angel is accompanied by her sister 'Liza-'Lu, who is the recreation of Tess's maidenly aspect, the only face of the goddess which is permitted by Victorian Christianity, which denies both the sexuality of her mature aspect and the amoral necessity for death and suffering which is exemplified by the hag. Angel and 'Liza-'Lu leave the medieval city of Wintoncester and seek the open fields where, as Tess dies, they bend themselves "down to the earth, as if in prayer," as the great cycle begins anew (p. 508). However, although Angel has been readmitted into the natural world, the goddess herself has died, sacrificed on the altar at Stonehenge. The cycles of nature continue without their divinity, as unconscious, purposeless, and pitiless as the sun which smiles on Angel's grief (p. 506), and we enter the post-mythic devastation of Jude the Obscure.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

[1] Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 225. Hereafter cited in text.

[2] Elliot B. Gose, Jr. points out that the evidence of Hardy's letters and notebooks indicates that in 1890 "Hardy had been doing a fair amount of reading in anthropology." Hardy also drew on ancient sources, as did Frazer. Gose believes that Hardy's reference to the Druid oaks of the Chase is drawn from Pliny's account of Druid sacrifice and ritual. "Psychic Evolution: Darwinism and Initiation in Tess of the d'Urbervilles," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 18 (1963), 261-272.

[3] Northrop Frye points out that Tess of the d'Urbervilles is an example of the mode of ironic tragedy which returns to ancient myth for its structure and imagery and that one of the problems of this return is the existence of a certain tension between the realistic and mythic modes which an author such as Hardy employs simultaneously. That which in a nineteenth century novel appears as "a tissue of improbable coincidences, inadequate motivation, and unconscious resolution" judged realistically, is logical when seen from the viewpoint of ironic myth. "Historical Criticism: Theory of Modes," Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 41-42.

[4] Charlotte Bonica, "Nature and Paganism in Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles," ELH, 49 (1982), p. 859.

[5] Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 269.

[6] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (London: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 10-12. Hereafter cited in text.

[7] Carrying flowers in procession is an ancient rite in honour of Adonis which was still practised in nineteenth century Europe. [James Frazer, The Golden Bough, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), Vol. V, p. 224]. The willow is sacred to the goddess, and the custom of "wearing the willow" as a rejected lover comes from an ancient charm to avert her wrath [Robert Graves, The White Goddess, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 173]. In Tess's case the willow is prophetic of Angel's rejection of her.

[8] Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960), pp. 100, 326-327.

9 Joseph Campbell traces the Biblical Eve to a very old aspect of the All Mother [Occidental Mythology, Vol. III of The Masks of God, 2nd ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 29-30, 57]. Thus, like Gabriel Oak, Tess has Biblical associations which have close ties with nature myth. Hardy uses Biblical, classical, and solar imagery, all of which have roots in the ancient worship of natural fertility, to emphasize Tess's blooming sexuality.

10 David J. De Laura, "'The Ache of Modernism' in Hardy's Later Novels," ELH, 34 (1967), 380-399.

11 James Hazen, "Angel's Hellenism in Tess of the d'Urbervilles," College Literature, 4 (1977), 133.

Chapter V

The Wasteland:
Jude the Obscure

In Jude the Obscure Hardy provides a view of the emotional and spiritual wasteland which results from the alienation from nature which is symbolized in The Woodlanders by the death of the god of seasonal cycles, and in Tess of the d'Urbervilles by the sacrifice of the goddess of fertility. In Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, and Tess of the d'Urbervilles each of the major characters is not only an individual, but also has an important mythical role. The plots follow the cycles of nature myths, as reflected in the agricultural seasons and in the ancient pre-Christian festivals which celebrated them. All of these features are missing in Jude the Obscure. The major characters are highly individualized, extremely self-conscious, and have no mythic roles. The exile from myth is also shown in a loss of continuity with the pre-Christian past, and of the peasant fatalism which makes the existence of death and suffering endurable because they are recognized as necessary parts of the great cycles of the natural world. The psychic displacement of the characters from their traditional relationship with nature is in part the result of the changes in rural

life which uprooted many people from the villages in which their ancestors had lived for many generations.

The changes which the nineteenth century brings to Marygreen cut the villagers off from much of their past.[1] The "utilitarian" improvements in agricultural techniques, which displaced so many country people, deprive the landscape

> of all history beyond that of the few recent months, though to every clod and stone there really attached associations enough to spare -- echoes of songs from ancient harvest-days. . . . Every inch of ground had been the site . . . of energy, gaiety, horse-play, bickering, weariness. . . . Love-matches that had populated the adjoining hamlet had been made up there between reaping and carrying. Under the hedge which divided the field from a distant plantation girls had given themselves to lovers who would not turn their heads to look at them by the next harvest . . . (pp. 38-39)

In marked contrast to Far From the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders and Tess of the d'Urbervilles, there are almost no reminders of the passage of the seasons in Jude the Obscure, and Hardy mentions the ancient spring trade fair at Kennetbridge only to say that it is "much dwindled" (p. 321). When Jude walks in the countryside with Arabella, he momentarily thinks of "the great age of the trackway, and of the drovers who had frequented it, probably before the Romans knew the country" (p. 78), but he quickly forgets this in the excitement of sexual pursuit. This incident is one of the very few references to the pre-Christian history of Wessex. Most of the historical references are

to urban, Christian, clerical and secular figures from the relatively recent past (pp. 104-106). Whenever Sue and Jude are placed together against a country landscape they are usually "so absorbed in their own situations that their surroundings were little on their consciousness" (p. 272). This is an example of modern man's intense preoccupation with his internal landscape and his resultant unresponsiveness to the natural world.

Jude's face, like Clym Yeobright's, is marked by thought, the heightened self-consciousness of alienated nineteenth century man (p. 101). Jude is a newcomer to Marygreen (pp. 40, 46), an orphan in spirit as well as in fact, cast out of the natural world by his inability to accept the inevitability of suffering which exists as a necessary part of nature's order. Jude's sympathy with the birds' "thwarted desires" leads him to an act of Christian charity. Unfortunately, his employer, Troutham, a pillar of the local church, "towards the building of which structure the farmer had largely subscribed, to testify his love for God and man," does not appreciate Jude's largesse, and forcibly impresses upon the boy "the perception of the flaw in the terrestrial scheme, by which what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener" (pp. 39-40). Jude is thus faced with the central Christian paradox, that some entities prosper at the expense of others in a universe which is described as the creation of a loving and perfectly just Creator: "Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for. That mercy towards one set of creatures was cruelty towards another sickened his sense of harmony" (p. 42).

As an adult, Jude faces the same problem of cosmic injustice in

the necessary and unpleasant task of pig-sticking. Arabella, the peasant, accepts that, "'Pigs must be killed'" and she tries to accomplish the messy, distasteful task as efficiently as possible (p. 88). Jude cannot participate whole heartedly in the execution, although he admits the necessity for it, and his merciful method of killing the pig lowers the quality of the meat. Jude feels reproached, "as a lover of justice, not to say a Christian," by the "blood of his fellow mortal," "but he could not see how the matter was to be mended" (p. 89). Unable to accept that pigs must be killed and that birds must go hungry if corn is to grow, Jude cannot see any alternative to this unsatisfactory state of affairs. The adherents of nature worship accepted as axiomatic the obvious truth that if some eat others must be eaten. Their rituals, which persisted as folk custom and magic in nineteenth century Wessex, were designed to ensure that pigs farrowed abundantly, and fattened successfully, that they might be killed and eaten, and that corn grew in order to be harvested. What Jude perceives as "the scorn of nature for man's finer emotions" (p. 195) is simply the result of the unconsciousness of natural processes, the amorality of which makes human concepts of justice irrelevant. Like Jude, Sue attempts a clumsy, inefficient act of evasion of "'Nature's law [of] mutual butchery'" by releasing some pigeons from a poulterer's cage. However, as Jude points out, this only means that the birds "'must take their chance'" in the wider world of nature, which possibly is even more indifferent to their sufferings than the poulterer (p. 319).

Thus the loss of nature myth symbolizes a triple loss, that of continuity with the past, of man's place as a participant in natural

processes, and of the fatalistic philosophy which alone makes the existence of pain and death endurable to Hardy's characters. Once man is removed from intimacy with agricultural cycles, and from an appreciation of the important part which death plays in the perpetuation of the natural order, and once, moreover, the Christian polarity of life and good versus death and evil is established, such alienation is almost inevitable.

Jude the Obscure is a dark vision of a man and a woman struggling to fill the vacancy created by this loss, either by a whole hearted immersion in Christianity, or by a return to what is perceived as the attitude of pagan Greece. Neither of these attempts proves successful. Jude's deep and sincere Christian faith, which is initially undermined by nature's "horrid logic," is eroded further by the snobbery of the Christian scholarly community of Christminster, and by the sexually repressive morality of Victorian Christian orthodoxy. Jude's treatment by the scholarly community and by those who are critical of his sexual unorthodoxy is very far from the ideal spirit of Christian charity which should inform the letter of Christian doctrine. Hardy chose "The letter killeth" as an epigraph to the title of Jude the Obscure because, in his view, Victorian society was over concerned with the letter of Christian doctrine at the expense of the spirit of loving-kindness. The patronizing contempt with which Jude's efforts at education are met is matched by the unkindness of the people of Christminster toward Sue's and Jude's irregular relationship (pp. 138, 338-341). Pregnant with her third child, Sue finds no room at the inn, and her despair, communicated to Little Father Time, results in the

murder-suicide of the children (pp. 342-344). A lack of charity is therefore partially responsible for their deaths. The truly charitable individual may even be punished by this society for his generosity. Phillotson is mercilessly persecuted for his humanity in releasing Sue from her hateful marriage contract to him (pp. 262, 365). Thus, in Jude the Obscure, the characters who best exemplify Christian charity are those who act out of instinctive humanity, often in direct contravention of doctrine (p. 246). Sue's return to Phillotson to save her own soul is contrasted with Jude's charity toward the unworthy Arabella. Indeed, Jude becomes a martyr to charity when Arabella opportunistically takes advantage of his despair (pp. 377, 381-382). Sue's momentary instinct of charity for Jude's pain is overcome by her selfish desire to save her own soul through suffering and expiation (p. 395). This triumph of "Jewish law" over "Christian grace" (p. 312) is the ascendancy of doctrinal orthodoxy over the great ethical truths of Christianity, which forces the sincere and devout Jude from the Christian fold. Hardy believes in the primacy of charity in sexual behaviour as in every other area of human interaction. To Hardy, both denial and self indulgence of the sexual instinct represent failures in loving-kindness. Deserted by both Sue and Arabella, by one woman who denies her sexuality and by a second who indulges it without stint, Jude on his deathbed seeks in vain for the charity of a drink of water (p. 408).

However, if Jude finds that Christianity does not answer his dilemma, Sue, the self proclaimed Hellenist, is no more successful in her attempt to live by what she perceives as the ideals of classical

Greece, because she, like Angel Clare, retains the suspicion and denial of the body of her orthodox Christian upbringing. Her attempt to live according to the rational joyousness of pagan Greece does not provide her with the emotional and spiritual resources necessary to cope with the disapproval of society, her own ambivalent sexuality, and the inevitable tragedies of existence. Hardy emphasizes that unless one can penetrate to the fatalism and sense of order which are implicit in nature myths and which underlie the classical ideal, one cannot hope to find in this ideal a meaningful spiritual guide to life.[2] Sue's Hellenism, like Angel's, is an intellectual exercise which does not engage the emotions, and, therefore, no matter how admirable Sue's attempts to guide her life by reason, the irrational and unconscious powers which govern the universe expose her to situations in which reason alone is insufficient to sustain her. Sue's hysterical collapse back into Christian orthodoxy is described by Jude as "'the most melancholy wreck of a promising human intellect that it has ever been my lot to behold'" (p. 394), but the attempt of modern alienated man to live solely by the intellect cannot be sustained, for his consciousness is too often at the mercy of his own powerful and irrational instincts. The attempt to control sexuality which is retained from Christianity is therefore responsible for undermining Sue's Hellenism as it does that of Angel Clare.

The difficulty of trying to live by the light of reason while dealing with one's own irrational sexual instinct is vividly illustrated by Sue's choice of patron divinities. Sue sees the image maker's wares against a background of brilliant green grass and the

Christminster towers, just as she sees Hellenism as an alternative both to the free expression of her natural passions, and to conventional Christian morality. Sue chooses Venus and rejects the maidenly Diana, and she selects Apollo instead of the vine-god Bacchus.[3] The goddess of sexual love and the god of light and reason represent the two poles between which Sue's pseudo-paganism strives to mediate. However, Sue's distaste for the physical, her retention of an inappropriate Christian denial of sexuality, leads her to wish that the statues were not "so very naked." Her allegiance to the principles which they embody is extremely superficial, for she attempts to deny and disguise their evident sexuality (pp. 116-117). Sue's outward adherence to the Greek ideal and her consequent defiance of Victorian orthodoxy cannot overcome her ingrained denial of her sexuality, and defiance quickly gives way to convention. Despite her protestations of unconventionality, Jude identifies Sue as at heart "'an urban miss'" (p. 158). Although she does not love him, Sue marries Phillotson to shelter herself from scandal, and when she enlists Jude's aid to obtain her release from her sexually repugnant husband, Sue refuses to consummate her union wih Jude ("'I haven't the courage of my views'") and she remains in fact "'enslaved to the social code'" (pp. 238, 254, 256).

What Hardy illustrates by Sue's behaviour is that a return to the vision of order which the classical world inherited from nature myths is impossible to modern man, for he can no longer experience the full emotional impact of ancient mythological symbols because of his alienation from the natural world. Sue wishes to divorce the classical

divinities from the natural world which gave them birth and to worship them as abstractions. She tries to use the symbols and values of paganism to oppose those of Christianity, but her efforts are undermined by her inability to accept her sexuality as an important part of her own makeup, and by her denial of the power of irrational forces to govern her behaviour.

Sue's alienation from the natural world is epitomized by this attempt to deny or control her own subtle but powerful sexuality. This alienation does not permit her to find a place in the post-mythic natural order, as Clare does, and she therefore abandons the light and rationality of Greek thought, and does violence to her own sexuality; she becomes an apostate to Apollo and to Venus, by her return to the unquestioning obedience of Christian expiation of sin, and to Phillotson. In so doing Sue abandons the extremely limited meliorative capacity which can be exercised only by those who admit the power and the irrationality of natural forces and attempt to mitigate their effects. Hardy objects to the regimentation of sexuality by the Victorian moral code, because of this failure to take into account the strength and caprice of natural instinct, which simply does not conform to the prevailing concepts of morality, "the forced adaptation of human instincts to rusty and irksome molds that do not fit them."[4] "'The social molds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns'" (pp. 222-223).

In Jude the Obscure Hardy bitterly attacks the Victorian sexual code as an example of the way in which man's limited meliorative

capacity is prevented from operating to minimize the natural cruelty of existence. Such an "unnatural" code increases human unhappiness in two ways, by creating totally avoidable misery by the erection of social institutions in opposition to powerful natural impulses, and by failing to find ways in which the inevitable devastations of these instincts can be minimized. Hardy proposes that, although a full return to the natural world is now impossible for man because of his heightened self-consciousness, he can at least attempt an honest assessment of his own instinctive nature and design a society which will partially compensate for the unavoidable tragedies and inequities of existence. Hardy's attitude to women is particularly relevant to this argument. Hardy has been cited both as a "typical" bigoted Victorian male, and as a man of unusual sensitivity to and sympathy for women.[5] Sue is really a rather fantastic creation, full of contradictions and warring impulses, and her sexual jealousy, selfishness, vanity, and flirtatiousness are quite repellent, although her fate ultimately arouses the reader's compassion (pp. 254-260).

Hardy's deep compassion for his female characters stems from his perception of them as beings who are more under the control of their sexual impulses than men, and who therefore are less able to meliorate their own condition. Sue's fellow students at the Melchester training school, despite their modernity and superior education, have:

> tender feminine faces . . . every face bearing the legend 'The Weaker' upon it, as the penalty of the sex wherein they were moulded, which by no possible exertion of their willing hearts and abilities could

> be made strong while the inexorable laws of nature remain what they are. They formed a pretty, suggestive, pathetic sight, of whose pathos and beauty they were themselves unconscious . . . . (pp. 160-161)

The Victorian double standard of sexuality only enhances this perceived inequality between the sexes. Hardy objects to the Mosaic code which Christianity adopted precisely because he feels that it exacerbates the cruelty arising from the natural "inequality" of the sexes by a discriminatory and vengeful sexual double standard which exacts the harshest penalties for transgression of the social code from the sex which is less able to control its sensuality by the will (pp. 328-329).

In its consideration of sex and marriage Jude the Obscure focusses on the actual and the proper relationship of the laws of nature to the conventions of society, and to the religious dogma which is used to uphold these social standards. Sue originally mistakes paganism for an attempt to live "'outside all laws except gravitation and germination,'" patterning human behaviour after a nature which she mistakenly believes wishes her to be happy (pp. 158, 348). Hardy felt that the cruelty of nature should be mitigated by, not mirrored in, human institutions, and that Diderot's dictum that "the civil law should be only the enunciation of the law of nature" "requires some qualification."[6] But if nature does not offer a pattern for human sexuality, the Christian approach only exacerbates the problem. The Christian view of marriage as a sacrament which ties people together for all eternity merely increases the agony occasioned by the sexually motivated mating of hopelessly mismatched individuals:

> 'People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces,' although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort.' (p. 273)
>
> 'It is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilised life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting!' (p. 232)

Throughout Jude the Obscure the question of whether marriage is a sacrament or a social contract is explored and the inability of Victorian Christian conventions to meliorate the ravages of sex is examined. Jude and Arabella are drawn together by sex without willing it, and despite their incompatibility (p. 64). Arabella is a peasant, "a complete and substantial female animal," who pragmatically views marriage as a social contract which confers certain benefits upon the participant, and whose brush with urban sophistication as a barmaid only serves to enhance artificially the devices she uses to attract Jude for the satisfaction of her own sexual desires (pp. 62, 82).

Hardy emphasizes the compulsion of sex, its ability to suspend the power of judgement and to paralyze the will (pp. 67-68), which makes a mockery of the marriage service:

> . . . the two swore that at every other time of their lives till death took them, they would assuredly believe, feel, and desire precisely as they had believed, felt, and desired during the few preceding weeks. What was as remarkable as the undertaking itself was the fact that nobody seemed at all surprised at what they swore. (p. 81)

The licensing of sexuality by Church and state allows Jude to spend a night with Arabella and to engage in a loveless but socially acceptable sexual act (pp. 199, 121, 202). However, Jude feels that "his lawful abandonment to the society of Arabella for twelve hours seemed instinctively a worse thing" than his illicit love for a married woman (p. 210). It is his surrender to his sexual passion for Sue to the extent of a single kiss which ends Jude's pursuit of a career in the Church:

> . . . though his kiss of that aerial being had seemed the purest moment of his faultful life, as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming the soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded at its best as a frailty, and at its worst damnation. (p. 233)

Just as his passion for Arabella unseated his intellect, so his love for Sue drives a wedge between Jude and his faith in the established Christian orthodoxy. Although Jude remains a devout Christian for long after this episode, the stresses to which his faith is subjected by its conflict with sexuality eventually undermine belief. Although initially he is prone to see the hand of Providence in chance events, Jude comes to doubt that "God sends people on fool's errands" to avoid an occasion of sexual temptation, and Sue's unhappiness in her marriage leads Jude to wonder if all is really for the best in a universe governed by a loving and omnipotent God (pp. 114-115, 213, 230). These metaphysical

doubts, which arise from his love for Sue, combine with the pressure of his own sexuality, and with the lack of loving-kindness exhibited by society toward Sue's and Jude's relationship, to erode Jude's faith to nothingness (pp. 320-321).

Thus the roots of Sue's and Jude's mutual tragedy are found in their alienation from nature, in their spiritual and physical removal from the cycles of rural life, and in their attempts to find a faith to live by either in a superficial pseudo-paganism, or in the doctrines of Christianity. For both Sue and Jude two issues make this attempt impossible. The first is the problem of evil, and the second is the failure of either Hellenism or Christian faith to cope with their sexuality. The point of intersection of these two problems is the enormous emphasis placed by Victorian society on sexual "sin" and the insistence on suffering on the part of the offender as expiation for this sin.

Sue is never able to achieve the fatalistic pagan view of the immanence of causation in the natural world, as exemplified by the deities whose histories are yearly re-enacted in the cycles of the seasons. She is bound by the Christian doctrine of transcendence, of the duality of Creator and creation, which seeks to find external causation for events and to attribute to that causative agency a moral motivation.[7] Thus Sue cannot accept the death of her children as the result of circumstances and accident arising out of the inevitable sorrow of existence, but explains their deaths as punishment for her sexual sin by a transcendent and vengeful deity:

> 'There is something external to us which says, "You shan't!". . . . it says, "You shan't love!"' (p. 347)
>
> 'We must conform! . . . All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit. . . . It is no use fighting against God!' (p. 351)

Jude, however, is able to accept these deaths fatalistically because of his early awakening to the cruelty and indifference of natural processes:

> '[the cause of suffering] is only . . . men and senseless circumstance.' (p. 351)
>
> 'Nothing can be done. . . . Things are as they are, and will be brought to their destined issue.' (p. 348)

Jude thus "correctly" identifies the sources of his suffering as unconscious and impersonal natural processes and the human lack of loving-kindness. However, his acceptance of suffering as unalterable is the fatalism of despair. Jude has lost the meliorative vision of nature myths, in which a fatalistic acceptance of a "full look at the Worst" is combined with an ethical impulse to seek out "the way to the Better."[8] Jude has lost a major source of consolation, a belief in man's limited capacity to better the human condition, and therefore he can only endure without hope.

Sue's response is even less consolatory and, ultimately, self destructive. By imposing a moral code on the universe, Sue admits the doctrine of sin and assigns to human error the responsibility for

suffering which arises from natural pain and from social conventions lacking in loving-kindness. Sue's "'fanatic prostitution'" consists of a perverse infliction upon herself of her sexual "duty" to Phillotson as a form of penance (pp. 368, 399). She fulfils the Christian ritual of atonement by penitence, confession and expiation through suffering. Three times Richard Phillotson offers her an opportunity to avoid the suffering which she perceives as her duty, and three times she refuses (pp. 401-403). Sue is condemned to a life of exquisite misery, alienated from herself intellectually and sexually, her sacrifice serving no purpose but to increase her sufferings in expiation of her sin. The news of her decision adds the last drop of bitterness to Jude's despair (p. 405).

At the novel's end, Jude experiences to the full the bitterness of the post-mythic wasteland. Neither Christianity nor Sue's Hellenism provide any comfort in a world in which he no longer has a part to play in natural processes. Since the gods of nature no longer exist in Jude's world, since he has rejected the consolations of Christianity, and has been denied the meliorating effects of human charity, he is left with nothing to sustain him but the bleak satisfaction of truth to himself. Jude dies in a state of despair which attains a certain grim dignity because he will not accept the illusory comfort of explanations for his suffering which Hardy believes are morally and intellectually unacceptable. In his extremity Jude repeats Job's questions, but the answers vouchsafed by the Book of Job explain the problem of evil in a way which Hardy consistently rejects, suggesting that although God's ways are inscrutable to man, they are ultimately just. For Hardy, Job's

query, "Why died I not from the womb?" remains unanswerable once man has lost the consoling fatalism which is embodied in nature myths (p. 408), which insists that birth and death, joy and sorrow, have equally important and complementary roles in the perpetuation of human life and in the continuance of the natural world.

Hardy saw the loss of nature myths as the loss of an irrecoverable belief system which satisfied man's emotional and spiritual need for order and purpose in human existence without insulting the intellect by insisting that all is for the best under the guidance of a just and benign God. To Hardy it was glaringly apparent that the universe is fundamentally unjust, but nature worship fatalistically accepts such injustice as necessary, and draws comfort and dignity from an acceptance of the inevitable. This dignity and comfort are not disturbed by a consciousness of guilt and responsibility for sin, or by a necessity to expiate sin by the deliberate infliction of suffering. On the contrary, man is encouraged by this belief to employ his limited freedom in the melioration of natural injustice, by the art and the science of agriculture, by rituals which foster the continuance of natural cycles, and by acts of loving-kindness toward the weak and the suffering. This is the meliorative vision of Far From the Madding Crowd which in succeeding novels succumbs to the forces of alienation and to Christian preoccupation with sin. Although in Jude the Obscure Hardy clearly feels that a return to the mythic world is impossible, he believes that man may learn from it the lessons of dignified acceptance of the inevitable, and the melioration of the possible, his "full look at the Worst" and "way to the Better." While rejecting Christian

concern with sin and atonement, Hardy values the concept of charity as an ethical imperative to the melioration of suffering. His greatest criticism of Christianity is reserved for its negation of this meliorating impulse by lending divine sanction to social conventions which concern themselves to such an extent with sin and atonement that they lose sight of charity. The most flagrant example of this misplaced emphasis is in Victorian sexual mores, and for this reason they became central to Hardy's criticism of Christianity.

In the end, Christianity is unable to sustain itself in the post-mythic world, because of its failure to supply acceptable explanations for the origin of evil, and because of its denial of the power of natural instinct. Having played its part in the alienation of man from nature, Christianity itself becomes the victim of alienation, and Jehovah joins the god and goddess of natural fertility in extinction.[9] This ultimate irony leaves man adrift in an unconscious and uncaring universe in which his only hope is the loving-kindness of his fellow men.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 Thomas Hardy, Jude the Obscure (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 35-36. Hereafter cited in the text.

2 Janet Burstein, "The Journey Beyond Myth in Jude the Obscure," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 15(1973), 499-515. Hardy's view that myths "express a fundamental coherence of man and world" was a commonly held nineteenth century opinion. Victorian thinkers saw the pagan universe as an integrated whole in which man had a part to play. Burstein believes that Tess of the d'Urbervilles and The Mayor of Casterbridge lament the passing of the mythic viewpoint, and that in Jude the Obscure Hardy explicitly rejects the possibility of a return to myth (p. 502).

3 Apollo the sun god is the ancestor of Apollo the god of reason, and his festival was held at the winter solstice. [Joseph Campbell, Occidental Mythology, Vol. III of The Masks of God, 2nd. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 163]. Bacchus, of course, is the Romanized Dionysus, the corn god who became a beer and then a vine god. [Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. I, 2nd. ed. (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 108].

4 Thomas Hardy, Postscript to the Preface to the first edition of Jude the Obscure, p. 29.

5 Penny Boumelha, Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982), p. 2.

6 Thomas Hardy, Postscript, p. 29.

7 Campbell, pp. 108-109, 252.

8 Thomas Hardy, "In Tenebris II," The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976), p. 168.

9 In "Aquae Sulis" the goddess addresses the Christian God whose church has been built atop her ruined temple:

> 'Your priests have trampled the dust of mine without rueing,
> Despising the joys of man whom I so much loved,
> Though my springs boil on your Gothic arcades and pewing,
> And sculptures crude. . . . Would Jove they could be removed!'
>
> '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!'

Thomas Hardy, "Aquae Sulis," Complete Poems, p. 376.

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