

POETIC LYRICISM IN THOMAS HARDY'S DESCRIPTIONS OF NATURE

by

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PhD, University of Cambridge, 1972

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

March 2020

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Poetic lyricism in Thomas Hardy's descriptions of nature

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the degree of Master of Arts
in English

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ABSTRACT

The Introduction shows that scholars disagree strongly about Thomas Hardy's creative abilities as a poet. To avoid this critical impasse, I limited the scope of my study to an aspect of Hardy's work about whose artistic value Hardy scholars agree: i.e., the inherent lyricism in Hardy's descriptions of nature.

In Chapter 1, I study sixteen poems written by Hardy in which nature is either the principal or the sole subject of the poem and show that the nature section(s) may be isolated and stand on their own.

In Chapter 2, I examine and versify some of Hardy's prose descriptions of nature to (1) show that some prose passages, like the nature sections in the poems discussed in Chapter 1, may be taken out of the whole and stand as a poem or prose narrative on their own and (2) bring their lyricism to the fore. The following excerpt from *The Return of the Native* (Gatrell 17) is an example of what I did:

MY VERSIFICATION

There the form stood,
 motionless as the hill beneath.
 Above the plain rose the hill,
 above the hill rose the barrow,
 above the barrow rose the figure,
 above the figure was nothing
 that could be mapped elsewhere
 than on a celestial globe.

ORIGINAL TEXT - PROSE

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

The strong rhythm given to this prose passage by the shortness of the sentences, the repetition of the words "above the" (rhetorical anaphora) and "rose the hill," "hill rose the barrow," "barrow rose the figure," "figure" (repetition and assonance) bring out Hardy's poetic intent and lyricism.

In the Epilogue, I summarise the basic conclusions reached in the main body of the essay in regard to: (1) the role that Hardy's descriptions of nature play within the passages where they occur and (2) the most important syntactic elements found in Hardy's lyrical descriptions of nature.

LAY SUMMARY

Literary lyricism is usually associated with poetry, where it does indeed more frequently appear. Some of Thomas Hardy's lyrical poems have been hailed as "some of the finest love poetry in our language" (Lewis, 170), but little has been written about the lyricism inherent in Hardy's prose descriptions of nature.

Hardy wrote sixteen poems and hundreds of prose passages in which nature is either the principal or the sole subject of the poem or the prose passage, from two-liners to entire pages. Often the lyrical qualities of the prose passages are unappreciated because the average reader is more interested in the plot and characters of the narrative than in factual descriptions of the natural surroundings.

The lyrical resonances become evident if the aural elements (rhyme, rhythm, repetition, alliteration, assonance) imbedded in Hardy's prose descriptions of nature are visualised: i.e., by isolating and versifying the sections where these elements occur.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Robert M. Flores. It was completed under the supervision of Dr. Suzy Anger.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to my Professor and Thesis Adviser, Dr. Suzy Anger, for her help and advice, and for the seemingly endless patience she showed throughout the five years it took me to carry out this project. To my Professor and Second Reader, Dr. Nicholas Hudson, my most heartfelt thanks for his help. I am also indebted to my Professor and Member of the Thesis Defense Committee, Dr. Pamela Dalziel, for her expert advice and detailed reading of the thesis. I would not have completed this thesis without the support they have so generously given me. I have learned wonderful things about Eighteen-Century and Victorian Literature from them.

To my beloved wife,
Karmen Blackwood

INTRODUCTION

Whenever the wind blew, as it did now, the [tall elm] rocked, naturally enough; and the sight of its motion, and sound of its sighs, had gradually bred [a] terrifying illusion in [John South's] mind. Thus he would sit all day, in spite of persuasion, watching its every sway, and listening to the melancholy Gregorian melodies which the air wrung out of it.

The Woodlanders (*W*, 1887, 83-84).

The sheer number of critical studies written about Thomas Hardy's works is overwhelming. And, yet, William W. Morgan's essay on Hardy's poetry ("Hardy's Poems: The Scholarly Situation," 2009) is a call to arms. Morgan's conclusion reads:

My theme has been plenty – the plenty that has characterized the past forty years of scholarly work on Hardy's poetry – and my conclusion is a call for renewal in the midst of that plenty: renewal in the form of better editions, better integration of biographical fact with interpretation, better attention to the way Hardy first presented his poems to the public, and better, fresher attention to the individual poems. (410)

The "References and Further Reading" attached to Morgan's essay and, among several other bibliographies, the eight pages of "Criticism–Poetry, *The Dynasts* and Drama (Books and Articles)" in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy* (2010)—"the most comprehensive collection of critical works on Hardy ever to appear in print within the covers of a single volume" (518)—are a clear warning that one should come well-armed if one attends to Morgan's call for action. One will have to face over a century and a half of literary criticism dealing with Hardy's life, fiction, poetry, and the other many writings of Hardy. Some critics view Hardy's novels (1871-1895) and poetry (1898-1928) as a creative continuum (Charles Lock, "Inhibiting the Voice: Thomas Hardy and Modern Poetics," 2009), whereas others see them as two completely different genres, stages, or careers (Tim D. Armstrong, "Supplementarity: Poetry as the Afterlife of Thomas Hardy," 1988); some scholars consider that Hardy was an extraordinarily skillful metrist but had some serious shortcomings as a poet and should have stopped writing soon after he abandoned fiction (Samuel Hynes, "On Hardy's Badnesses," 1983),

others that he had a particularly lyrical virtuosity, was able to write some of the finest love poems in English, and laud him for writing poetry until late in life (Cecil Day Lewis, “The Lyrical Poetry of Thomas Hardy,” 1951); some place his verses squarely within the Victorian era of English poetry (Dennis Taylor, “Thomas Hardy and Thomas Gray: The Poet’s Currency,” 1998), others within the first half of the twentieth century (Lock); some think that there is virtually no pastoral in Hardy’s poetry (Taylor, *Hardy’s Poetry*, second edition 1989), others that pastoral and georgic play an important role in it (Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral?*, 1996; Indy Clark, *Thomas Hardy’s Pastoral: An Unkindly May*, 2015). These commentaries have been written by critics who have studied a wide range of Hardyian topics over decades and centre on specific aspects of Hardy’s work, but my intention here is to present an overall view of the contradictory opinions that Hardy’s poetry invites and emphasise some of the critical vicissitudes Hardy’s writings have gone through during the last sixty years.¹ From these critical points of view and commentaries one can safely conclude that Hardy was indeed a great poet and that this critical judgment would have had no grounds to be questioned had he published substantially fewer poems than he released to public opinion. Philip Larkin disagrees in this respect:

Curiously enough, what I like about Hardy is what most people dislike. I like him because he wrote so much. I love the great Collected Hardy which runs for something like 800 pages. One can read him for years and years and still be surprised, and I think that’s a marvellous thing to find in a poet. (“The Poetry of Thomas Hardy,” 132)

Let us turn now to Hardy’s writings to characterise the contradictory opinions that his works awake in readers. In “So Various” (855), Hardy assigns to some men differing and even opposing characteristics.² They are young, brisk, highly strung, stiff, old, cold, mirthless, moanful, staunch, robust, tender, fickle, stupid, learned, sad, glad, slow, shrewd, swift—and one

¹ It is impossible to do justice, in the limited space I have at my disposal, to the invaluable Hardyian scholarship contributed by the critics that I cite in this thesis. Suffice it to say that their thoroughness and dedication are admirable: see Appendix 1.

² All reference numbers to Hardy’s poems are to *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy (CP)* 1979.

and the same man. If we replace “men” with “verse” and “I” with “my poetry” in the last stanza of the poem we have:

Now. . . All these specimens of verse,
So various in their pith and plan,
Curious to say
Were *one* verse. Yea,
My poetry was all they.

In other words, one may rest assured that critics will find in Hardy’s works whatever they may be searching for to support their differing points of view and different opinions. In this study I take into account what the two principal characters in *Two on a Tower* (*TT*, 1882) say about the moods of the Wind and what Hardy himself states in *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (*Life*, 1962) about Art:

. . . “The wind doesn’t seem disposed to put the tragic period to our hopes and fears that I spoke of in my momentary despair.”

“The disposition of the wind is as vicious as ever,” [answered Lady Constantine.] . . . “It is your mood of viewing it that has changed. ‘There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.’” (*TT* 106)

At that moment in the narrative, the wind is ill disposed and “as vicious as ever” because that is how Viviette and Swithin think of it, but nature’s violence and seeming indifference to human plight does not imply detachment or lacking of care but rather a neutral state of being. Nature is what it is, neither inclement nor propitious towards human affairs. And, writing about art, Hardy states:

Art is a changing of the actual proportions and order of things, so as to bring out more forcibly than might otherwise be done that feature in them which appeals most strongly to the idiosyncrasy of the artist. The changing, or distortion, may be of two kinds: (1) The kind which increases the sense of vraisemblance: (2) That which diminishes it. (1) is high art: (2) is low art. . . .

‘Art is a disproportioning — (*i.e.* distorting, throwing out of proportion) — of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked. Hence “realism” is not Art.’ (*Life* 228-9; 5 August 1890)

Hardy's detailed landscapes and care for nature are acknowledged by virtually every critic, but there seems to be no scholarly study dedicated to this subject alone. Joanna Cullen Brown, for instance, quotes hundreds of Hardy's descriptions of nature—from one-liners to entire pages—in *Let Me Enjoy the Earth: Thomas Hardy and Nature* (1990), but she introduces the passages quoted with brief, uncritical remarks, and gives no page-references to the edition(s) from which the passages were taken.

In the first chapter of this thesis I examine some Hardyverse descriptions of nature and natural phenomena. In Chapter 2, I isolate and versify some of Hardy's prose descriptions of nature to make their lyricism stand out.³ My aim is to point out some of the more important lyrical elements that make Hardy's disproportioning of nature and natural phenomena high art.

This study is a guided tour through a gallery exhibiting a selection of Thomas Hardy's depictions of the natural world. I propose to show that Hardy's detailed descriptions of scenery and natural phenomena, although accurately reported as an inventory (realism), have the features "which appeal most strongly" to Hardy's idiosyncrasy and "show more clearly the features that matter in those realities." I will show that in Hardy's prose descriptions of nature and natural phenomena it is not unusual to find "music in the breeze," little trees that sigh while being planted when they are put "upright, though while they are lying down they don't sigh at all," "funeral trees [that rock and chant] dirges unceasingly" (*W* 5, 59, 218), or "the wind . . . playing over the trees . . . as on the strings of a lyre" (*TT* 108).

³ The definition of the word *lyric* in *Roget's Super Thesaurus* (2003) is: "songlike, poetic, musical, melodic . . ." I will apply this definition of *lyric*, and by extension of *lyricism*, to the Hardy verse and prose descriptions of nature considered in this study.

CHAPTER 1

Descriptions of Nature in Hardy's Poetry

An object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature. Hence clouds, mists, and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand.

Early Life 153; cited by Indy Clark, 59-60.

A “nature poem,” strictly speaking, is a poem which deals with nature and natural phenomena alone but, for the purpose of this study, I will extend the definition to include those poems which (1) have a substantial description of nature in relation to the rest of the poem if (2) such a description can be isolated and (3) may stand on its own. Hardy wrote the following in his “Preface” to the 1912 Wessex edition of *Desperate Remedies* (DR, 1871):

The reader may discover, when turning over this sensational and strictly conventional narrative, that certain scattered reflections and sentiments therein are the same in substance with some in the *Wessex Poems* and others, published many years later. The explanation of such tautology is that the poems were written before the novel, but as the author could not get them printed, he incontinently used here whatever of their content came into his head as being apt for the purpose—after dissolving it into prose, never anticipating at that time that the poems would see the light. (See *Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings*, Hardy 1990, 4)

It is not clear here whether Hardy utilised in his novels only the content of the poem (“scattered reflections and sentiments) or dissolved both content and poetry into prose. He probably did both.⁴

Wessex Poems, Hardy's first book of poetry, appeared in 1898, but Hardy was already writing poetry in the 1860s and continued throughout his novel-writing period. Writing about

⁴ Pamela Dalziel has found some of those reflections and sentiments in *Desperate Remedies* (“Exploiting the *Poor Man*: The Genesis of Hardy's *Desperate Remedies*,” 1995). See also Patricia Ingham's “Appendix 1: Hardy's Poems ‘dissolved into’ *Desperate Remedies*,” in her edition of Hardy's *Desperate Remedies*, 2009, pp. 383-7.

Hardy's long-lasting love for poetry in *Thomas Hardy's 'Studies, Specimens &c.' Notebook*, Pamela Dalziel and Michael Millgate bring to light "Hardy's exertions and aspirations in the mid-1860s, when he was still working in London as an assistant to a prominent architect and tentatively feeling his way towards as yet dimly-glimpsed possibilities of literary expression and employment" (ix-x). Hardy, Dalziel and Millgate continue,

specifically identified 1865-7 as a period during which he 'read and wrote [poetry] exclusively', and in the largely autobiographical 'Life' he spoke especially of 1866 and 1867 as years during which he not only devoted himself to the reading of verse, as containing 'the essence of all imaginative and emotional literature', but was 'constantly' writing it. (xi-xii)

And yet, throughout his career Hardy wrote only four nature poems: "On Sturminster Foot-Bridge" (426), "A Backward Spring" (445), "Last Week in October" (673), and "Proud Songsters (816)," and only twelve poems that fall within the broader definition stated above. Furthermore, none of these sixteen poems appear in Hardy's first three books of poetry (*Wessex Poems*, 1898; *Poems of the Past*, 1901 (post-dated 1902); *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses*, 1909), perhaps because the content of all the earlier descriptions of nature that Hardy had originally written as poems had already been dissolved and interspersed in his novels.

In *A Critical Introduction to the Poems of Thomas Hardy* (1991), Trevor Johnson notes that "there are no more than thirty poems that can fairly be called descriptive in terms of their primary intention. "There are, however," Johnson continues,

good reasons for this relative abstinence. First is the fact that [. . . Hardy was not . . .] disposed to compete with such word-painters of the rural scene as his friend William Barnes [. . .] Second, bearing in mind that the incidence of such poems becomes very much higher from *Satires of Circumstance* (1914) onwards – in which virtually all the poems had been written well after he had finished with fiction – it is fair to assume that this particular aspect of his creative imagination had been almost wholly subsumed in his prose.

Lastly, his actual handling of description was original. In one exceptionally striking and innovative poem, *After a Romantic Day* [599], he gives us valuable insights into both his

practice and his theory. . . . He believed it was time for a reappraisal of received notions as to what should be regarded as ‘beautiful’; arguing in the *Life* that ‘Nature’s defects’, so called, may in the hands of the artist be made ‘the basis of a hitherto unperceived beauty, . . . seen to be latent in them by the spiritual eye.’ (98-99)

In chapter 5, in a section entitled “Poems about Seasons and Places,” Johnson mentions the titles of twenty-eight poems and refers to twenty-one other poems as belonging to four groups (54-64, 424-5, 698-701, 705-8), but he does not clarify whether all or any of these twenty-one poems are descriptive. He studies in some detail eight nature poems (“Where They Lived,” “At Middle-Field Gate in February,” “On Sturminster Foot-Bridge,” “Growth in May,” “Last Week in October,” “The Later Autumn,” “Snow in the Suburbs,” and “An Unkindly May”) and comments on three other (“The Year’s Awakening,” “Overlooking the River Stour,” and “Proud Songsters”). He considers that Hardy’s “unrivalled evocation of the wild North Atlantic coast of Cornwall” in “The Wind’s Prophecy” is “entirely self-contained and could, to its great advantage, be detached from the turgid prophesyings of the wind” (107).

Among the numerous studies of individual poems see, for a detailed and engaging study of “On Sturminster Foot-Bridge,” Taylor 1988 (102, 106-11). Taylor considers that “Last Week in October” is a pastoral poem (1989; 151). Schur studies “A Backward Spring” in *Victorian Pastoral: Tennyson, Hardy, and the Subversion of Forms* (1989; 177-79). Clark discusses at length “An Unkindly May” and briefly “A Backward Spring” and “At Middle-Field Gate in February” (21-30, 95-96, 162-63). Armstrong’s elegant edition, *Thomas Hardy: Selected Poems* (2014), contains 183 poems, of which five are nature poems (424, 445, 675, 701, 816). Tom Paulin considers “Proud Songsters” in “‘The Proudest Songster of Them All’: Some Thoughts on Three ‘Everyday’ Lyrics” (491-4). But the sixteen nature poems listed in Appendix 2 have not as yet been considered as belonging to a group of their own nor have they been studied as such.

In this essay I will study these poems, but in order to show the differences between them and other poems which do not fulfill the three conditions listed above I shall now examine Hardy’s poems “A Spellbound Palace” and “Afterwards.”

688. A Spellbound Palace
(Hampton Court)

On this kindly yellow day of mild low-travelling winter sun
 The stirless depths of the yews
 Are vague with misty blues:
 Across the spacious pathways stretching spires of shadow run,
 And the wind-gnawed walls of ancient brick are fired vermilion.

Two or three early sanguine finches tune
 Some tentative strains, to be enlarged by May or June:
 From a thrush or blackbird
 Comes now and then a word,
 While an enfeebled fountain somewhere within is heard.

Our footsteps wait awhile,
 Then draw beneath the pile,
 When an inner court outspreads
 As 'twere History's own asile,
 Where the now-visions fountain its attenuate crystal sheds
 In passive lapse that seems to ignore the yon world's clamorous clutch,
 And lays an insistent numbness on the place, like a cold hand's touch.
 And there swaggers the Shade of a straddling King, plumed, sworded,
 with sensual face,
 And lo, too, that of his Minister, at a bold self-centred pace:
 Sheer in the sun they pass; and thereupon all is still,
 Save the mindless fountain tinkling on with thin enfeebled will.

The nature section of the poem could stand on its own:

On this kindly yellow day of mild low-travelling winter sun
 the stirless depths of the yews
 are vague with misty blues:
 across the spacious pathways stretching spires of shadow run,
 and the wind-gnawed walls of ancient brick are fired vermilion.
 Two or three early sanguine finches tune
 some tentative strains, to be enlarged by May or June:
 from a thrush or blackbird
 comes now and then a word.

But the main thrust of the poem is the description of Hampton Court and the vision of Henry VIII and Thomas Wolsey, and whereas the nature portion of the poem has nine lines the non-nature section has thirteen lines.

511. Afterwards

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

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

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

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

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

If we isolate Hardy's four separate descriptions of nature (lines 2-3; 6-7; 10, 14; 18) and group them together we would have:

The May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
 delicate-filmed as new-spun silk.
 The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
 upon the wind-warped upland thorn.
 The hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn
 watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
 And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings.

"A Spellbound Palace" and "Afterwards" are good examples of poems that has substantial nature content either as an introduction to the main non-nature section of the poem or interspersed within the main body of a poem in which the verses are not so much describing nature as erecting a scaffold for the speaker or narrator to express his thoughts and feelings. In "A Spellbound Palace" the speaker describes the entrance and an inner court of Hampton Court and the vision of King Henry VIII and his Minister. In the second poem, he is wondering whether other people will remember him after his death and, if they do, what will their thoughts be. Nature appears too entwined with the feelings and thoughts of the poet to be discerned clearly. (For other poems that fall within the same group as "A Spellbound Palace" and "Afterwards" see Appendix 2.) If, on the other hand, we isolate the nature section(s) of Hardy's sixteen nature poems the descriptions

of nature would stand out clearer. (For textual alterations and lines not quoted in the text see the sixteen poems entered in Appendix 3.)

Description of nature in “The Year’s Awakening” (275)

The vespering bird knows that
 the pilgrim track along the belting zodiac
 swept by the sun in his seeming rounds
 is traced by now to the Fishes’ bounds
 and into the Ram, when weeks of cloud
 have wrapt the sky in a clammy shroud,
 and never as yet a tinct of spring
 has shown in the Earth’s apparelling.

Deep underground, the crocus root knows,
 hid in its bed from sight and sound,
 without a turn in temperature,
 with weather life can scarce endure,
 that light has won a fraction’s strength,
 and day put on some moments’ length,
 whereof in merest rote will come,
 weeks hence, mild airs that do not numb.

The sixteen lines describing nature in this poem are merely the scaffold that supports the six-time repetition of the phrase “how do you know.” The main motif of the poem is the speaker’s wondering how it is that a bird and a root are aware that the arrival of spring is evident and, thus, prepare for it even though they cannot interpret rationally the signs only he is capable of deciphering. The poem, however, fulfills the requirements needed for a nature poem: the description of nature is substantial (without any human traces), can be isolated, and may stand on its own. The first two stanzas of the following poem could also stand alone:

Description of nature in “At Middle-Field Gate in February” (421)

The bars are thick with drops that show
 as they gather themselves from the fog
 like silver buttons ranged in a row,
 and as evenly spaced as if measured, although
 they fall at the feeblest jog.

They load the leafless hedge hard by,
 and the blades of last year’s grass,
 while the fallow ploughland turned up nigh
 in raw rolls, clammy and clogging lie –
 too clogging for feet to pass.

The depiction of a decaying gate and its immediate natural surroundings in the first two stanzas of the poem is a straightforward description of nature. The only human vestiges in these stanzas are the gate and ploughland, and a reference to feet. In the third stanza (Appendix 3), Hardy recurs to the same technique he uses in several other poems: i.e., as Indy Clark observes, he establishes “a comparison between seasons with the present winter compared to a distant summer” (162). The description of nature in the first two stanzas of the poem could be used as part of a winter narrative in a Hardyian prose passage.

“Overlooking the River Stour” would require the deletion of the fourth stanza and of some words repeated in the first three stanzas of the poem (1-2 = 5-6, 7-8 = 11-12, 13-14 = 17-18) to show that the nature content can be intercalated in a prose passage without undue poetic emphasis by specific lines or rhyming words.

Description of nature in “Overlooking the River Stour (424)

The swallows flew in the curves of an eight
 above the river-gleam
 in the wet June’s last beam:
 like little crossbows animate
 the swallows flew in the curves of an eight
 above the river-gleam.

Planing up shavings of crystal spray
 a moor-hen darted out
 from the bank thereabout,
 and through the stream-shine ripped his way;
 planing up shavings of crystal spray
 a moor-hen darted out.

Closed were the kingcups; and the mead
 dripped in monotonous green,
 though the day’s morning sheen
 had shown it golden and honeybee’d;
 closed were the kingcups, and the mead
 dripped in monotonous green.

The detailed descriptions of the lesser things gazed at from behind a “pane’s drop-drenched glaze” in the three quatrains serve, once again, as a scaffold for what the speaker says about past happenings: “And never I turned my head, alack, | While these things met my gaze | Through the pane’s drop-drenched glaze, | To see the more behind my back. . . . | O never I turned, but let,

alack, | These less things hold my gaze!” Hardy now regrets not having turned his head to see the far more important *more* standing behind his back closer and clearer than the outdoors *less*: swallows, moor-hen, kingcups, river. In this poem Hardy is not in communion with nature, he is not describing a particularly enchanting scene. He was not staring at the lesser things in admiration or awe but rather in thought, well aware now that he foolishly ignored what he knew was behind him. In this poem Hardy is not focusing on nature, *these less things*, but on what he did wrong, *alack!* “The poetry of a scene,” Hardy noted in *Life*, “varies with the minds of the perceivers. Indeed, it does not lie in the scene at all” (50). With only minor alterations, both “At Middle-Field Gate in February” and “Overlooking the River Stour” could be interpolated in one of Hardy’s numerous prose passages where a character is reminiscing about either bygone missed opportunities or happier days without seeming misplaced.

“An Unkindly May” is also an excellent example of an apparently uncomplicated, straight forward making of a nature poem, or a prose passage from one of Hardy’s novels or short stories. The poem consists of three distinct sections. The middle section is a nature poem on its own.

Description of nature in “An Unkindly May” (825)

The sour spring wind is blurting boisterous-wise,
and bears on it dirty clouds across the skies;
plantation timbers creak like rusty cranes,
and pigeons and rooks, dishevelled by late rains,
are like gaunt vultures, sodden and unkempt,
and song-birds do not end what they attempt:
the buds have tried to open, but quite failing
have pinched themselves together in their quailing.
the sun frowns whitely in eye-trying flaps
through passing cloud-holes, mimicking audible taps.
“Nature, you’re not commendable to-day!”
I think. “Better to-morrow!” she seems to say.

The first and third stanzas may be set one after the other as a separate, reiterative thought:

A shepherd stands by a gate in a white smock-frock;
he holds the gate ajar, intently counting his flock.
That shepherd still stands in that white smock-frock,
unnoting all things save the counting his flock.

Hardy might have been remembering a particularly wintry May when he wrote this poem. The title of the poem implies a period of thirty-one, weather-bitten days, and the formal separation between the first and last distichs of the poem suggest that some time has elapsed between the two stanzas. The poem, however, is descriptive rather than narrative. It describes a single, specific scene of active Nature. The verb forms used throughout the poem are all present tense: “is,” “bears,” “creak,” “are,” “end,” “attempt,” the buds are pinched, “frowns,” the clouds mimic as they pass, “you’re,” “seems to say.” At the conclusion of the poem the shepherd, in other words, is still in the same stage of counting his flock as he is at the beginning of the poem. In “An Unkindly May,” Hardy depicts a static scene in which all the different elements of the description are taking place simultaneously rather than sequentially: the “wind is blurting” as the sun is frowning “through passing cloud-holes.” The weather may be better tomorrow, the narrator says to himself, trying to read Nature’s thoughts, although Nature itself reveals nothing to him.

The speaker in “An Unkindly May,” like three other speakers in the nature poems quoted above, is observing and describing nature and natural phenomena. The speaker in this poem is describing what bad weather does to plants and birds. The speaker in “The Year’s Awakening” is wondering how a bird and a crocus root could know that the arrival of spring is imminent. The speaker in “At Middle-Field Gate in February” is describing nature as it is in the present; the speaker in “Overlooking the River Stour” as it was in the past, both speakers are using nature as background for memories of happier times. All four speakers are at rest.

The speaker in “Growth in May,” on the other hand, is not at rest. He is crossing a field and describes nature as he sees it reflected in the apparently listless attitude of a woman who seems to be waiting, perhaps in vain, for *her* Love.

Description of nature in “Growth in May” (583)

I enter a daisy-and-buttercup land,
 and thence thread a jungle of grass:
 hurdles and stiles scarce visible stand
 above the lush stems as I pass.

Hedges peer over, and try to be seen,
 and seem to reveal a dim sense

that amid such ambitious and elbow-high green
they make a mean show as a fence.

Elsewhere the mead is possessed of the neats,
that range not greatly above
the rich rank thicket which brushes their teats.

With the exception of the words “I enter . . . and then thread . . . as I pass” the rest of the lines quoted above is a brief description of a country scene, but the last line of the poem introduces a poignant element to the scene:

and *her* gown, as she waits for her Love.

Nature has now all but disappeared behind the speaker’s entering, threading, seeing a woman whom he assumes is waiting for her lover, and passing through without stopping or acknowledging her presence. A bountiful, spring landscape, “a daisy-and-buttercup land . . . elbow-high green” grass, a romantic interlude which in other situations could lead to pleasant feelings and thoughts becomes harsh by the use of such words as “jungle,” “hurdles,” “scarce,” “neats,” “rank thicket,” and “teats.” They forebode a heart-breaking denouement. How long has she been waiting for? Does the narrator know her and know also that her love will be eventually show up, or is he hinting at something like the “You did not come, | And Marching Time drew on, and wore me numb. | . . . | You love not me” of “The Broken Appointment” (99)? Or is he himself, the narrator, the Love, not the lover she is waiting for? The narrator seems to be threading “a jungle of grass” unaware of both the beauty of the landscape and that the woman is wearing a gown unfit for the surroundings because she is trying to impress him. He is perhaps mistakenly thinking that she is waiting for someone else.

In Hardy’s poetry *waiting* and *passing* are two very important time elements. They underscore the uneven relationship that exists between nature and humans. The vespering bird and the root of the crocus are patiently waiting in “The Year’s Awakening” for the passing of time and the arrival of better weather, whereas the narrator is concerned about nature not responding immediately to the outward signs that spring is imminent. In the first three and last five lines of

“Before and after Summer” Hardy describes the various feelings and thoughts that the passing of time awakens in him.

Description of nature in “Before and after Summer” (273)

	I
winter	On this February day though the winds leap down the street wintry scourgings seem but play, and these later shafts of sleet – sharper pointed than the first – and these later snows – the worst – are as a half-transparent blind riddled by rays from sun behind.
spring and summer	
	II
fall	Shadows of the October pine reach into this room of mine: on the pine there swings a bird; he is shadowed with the tree. Mutely perched he bills no word.

He mentions winter (“February”) and fall (“October”), but neither spring nor summer are mentioned at all in the body of the poem. They seem to have disappeared together with the *happy suns and pleasures* the poet yearns for in the last four lines of the poem. A more explicit title for the poem would have been, perhaps, “Before and after Spring and Summer.” Be that as it may, time passes by and hope (“Looking forward”) does bloom under “happy suns,” but time rushes through sunny moments and disappears, which is, of course, one of Hardy’s overriding concerns in both poetry and prose. Life and its surroundings are “a tragical rather than a comical thing; . . . though one could be gay on occasion, moments of gaiety [are] interludes, and no part of the actual drama” (*The Mayor of Casterbridge, MC*, 1886, 52). Hardy also contrasts the regular tic, toc, tic, toc, winter, spring, summer, fall, winter, spring, summer, fall of the seasons in his poetry, stressing the length difference between warm, clear, and sunny days and cold, rainy, cloudy months. Poems 392, 455, and 675 are three nature poems that stress the close relationship that exists between time and death in Hardy’s poetry.

Description of nature in “Where They Lived” (392)

Dishevelled leaves creep down
upon that bank to-day,

some green, some yellow, and some pale brown;
 the wet bents bob and sway;
 the once warm slippery turf is sodden.

The summerhouse is gone,
 leaving a weedy space;
 the bushes that veiled it once have grown
 gaunt trees that interlace,
 and where were hills of blue,
 blind drifts of vapour blow.

The last verse of “A Middle-Field Gate in February”: “How dry it was on a far-back day | When straws hung the hedge and around, | When amid the sheaves in amorous play | In curtained bonnets and light array | Bloomed a bevy now underground!” would naturally follow the last two lines of “Where They Lived”: “And instead of a voice that called, ‘Come in, Dears,’ | Time calls, ‘Pass below!’”

Description of nature in “The Upper Birch-Leaves” (455)

Warm yellowy-green
 in the blue serene,
 how they skip and sway
 on this autumn day!
 They cannot know
 what has happened below, –
 that their boughs down there
 are already quite bare,
 that their own will be
 when a week has passed, –
 for they jig as in glee
 to this very last.

Description of nature in “The Later Autumn” (675)

Gone [are] the bees
 leg-laden, back
 with a dip to their hive
 in a prepossessed dive.

Toadsmeat is mangy, frosted, and sere;
 apples in grass
 crunch as we pass,
 and rot ere the men who make cyder appear.
 Couch-fires abound
 on fallows around,
 and shades far extend
 like lives soon to end.

Spinning leaves join the remains shrunk and brown
 of last year’s display

that lie wasting away,
 on whose corpses they earlier as scorners gazed down
 from their aery green height:
 now in the same plight
 they huddle; while yon
 a robin looks on.

Time, death, seasons, and decay are themes intimately interwoven in Hardy's poetry, but the descriptions of nature in "Where They Lived," "The Upper Birch-Leaves," and "The Later Autumn" are particularly poignant. "Gone are the lovers, . . . Gone the bees . . . And shades far extend | Like lives soon to end," notes Hardy in "The Later Autumn." Yes, cry the leaves in "The Upper Birch-Leaves;" "Though life holds yet – | We go hence soon, | For 'tis November; | – But that *you* follow | you may forget!" In these three poems several of the key words that Hardy uses in his descriptions are grating: dishevelled, creep, slippery, sodden, gone, weedy, gaunt, lank, nakedness, bare, last, toadsmeat, mangy, frosted, sere, crunch, rot, fallows, shades, end, shrunk, wasting, corpses, scorners, plight, huddle. The weather in autumn, later autumn, and mid-fall is unpredictable from one day to the next, but nature is already foretelling the imminent arrival of winter; though the doings of winter can on occasions be visually appealing, cosy when watched from indoors, and even funny.

Description of nature in "Snow in the Suburbs" (701)

Every branch big with it,
 bent every twig with it;
 every fork like a white web-foot;
 every street and pavement mute:
 some flakes have lost their way, and grope back upward, when
 meeting those meandering down they turn and descend again.
 The palings are glued together like a wall,
 and there is no waft of wind with the fleecy fall.

A sparrow enters the tree,
 whereon immediately
 a snow-lump thrice his own slight size
 descends on him and showers his head and eyes,
 and overturns him,
 and near inurns him,
 and lights on a nether twig, when its brush
 starts off a volley of other lodging lumps with a rush.

The steps are a blanched slope,
up which, with feeble hope,
a black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin.

And winter is also the perfect season for a good deed; “and,” the narrator reveals in the last line of the poem, “we take him in.”

The effect that the passing of time has on nature and the feelings it awakes in the narrator are also described in the last stanza of “At Day-Close in November:”

And the children who ramble through here
conceive that there never has been
a time when no tall trees grew here,
that none will in time be seen.

Children ramble through life in the *present* unaware of the *past* and unconcerned about the *future*, but *noon-time* lasts but a moment between morning and afternoon, like spring and summer between winter and fall. Trees are planted, grow, and disappear; seasons arrive, linger on or rush through, and pass. Life fades without our noticing it.

Description of nature in “At Day-Close in November” (274)

The ten hours’ light is abating,
and a late bird wings across,
where the pines, like waltzers waiting
give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time,
float past like specks in the eye;
I set every tree in my June time,
and now they obscure the sky.

One of the four poems wholly dedicated to describing nature, “On Sturminster Foot-Bridge,” has some human traces quietly embedded in it:

426. On Sturminster Foot-Bridge

Reticulations creep upon the slack stream’s face
When the wind skims irritably past,
The current clucks smartly into each hollow place
That years of flood have scabbled in the pier’s sodden base;
The floating-lily leaves rot fast.

On a roof stand the swallows ranged in wistful waiting rows,
Till they arrow off and drop like stones

Among the eyot-withies at whose foot the river flows:
 And beneath the roof is she who in the dark world shows
 As a lattice-gleam when midnight moans.

If one accepts Hardy's dictum quoted above to the effect that "an object . . . made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature," then the "pier's sodden base" and the "roof" would be the most important elements in "On Sturminster Foot-Bridge." But because in this particular instance neither the narrator nor any personal comment by the narrator appears in the description, the most important elements in the poem are the reticulations that "creep" when the wind "skims," the current that "clucks," the floods that scabble, the leaves that float and "rot," the swallows that wait and "drop like stones," she who "shows" as a lattice-gleam, and the noises the current of the river makes running against the wind.

"Proud Songsters," "A Backwater Spring" and "Last Week in October" are three nature poems with no traces whatsoever of human presence:

816. Proud Songsters

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

These are brand-new birds of twelve-months' growing,
 Which a year ago, or less that twain,
 No finches were, nor nightingales,
 Nor thrushes,
 But only particles of grain,
 And earth, and air, and rain.

This short poem appears in *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres*, Hardy's last book of poetry, which was published posthumously in 1928. "Proud Songsters" is a very special poem in the sense that it does not talk about time leading to death but rather towards life, about "particles of grain" springing alive from "earth, and air, and rain." It is about birds singing and whistling in mid-spring as "if all Time were theirs." The term "loud" applied to nightingales implies liveliness and activity in contrast to the lifelessness and silence of earth, air, and rain. The other two nature

poems without human traces, on the contrary, speak of a backward spring and the undressing of the trees at the end of October.

445. A Backward Spring

The trees are afraid to put forth buds,
 And there is timidity in the grass;
 The plots lie gray where gouged by spuds,
 And whether next week will pass
 Free of sly sour winds is the fret of each bush
 Of barberry waiting to bloom.

Yet the snowdrop's face betrays no gloom,
 And the primrose pants in its heedless push,
 Though the myrtle asks if it's worth the fight
 This year with frost and rime
 To venture one more time
 On delicate leaves and buttons of white
 From the selfsame bough as at last year's prime,
 And never to ruminare on or remember
 What happened to it in mid-December.

673. Last Week in October

The trees are undressing, and fling in many places –
 On the gray road, the roof, the window-sill –
 Their radiant robes and ribbons and yellow laces;
 A leaf each second so is flung at will,
 Here, there, another and another, still and still.

A spider's web has caught one while downcoming,
 That stays there dangling when the rest pass on;
 Like a suspended criminal hangs he, mumming
 In golden garb, while one yet green, high yon,
 Trembles, as fearing such a fate for himself anon.

Either poem, 445 or 673, could be interpolated in any of the numerous prose passages where the general mood and tone of the nature poem and the prose passage match one another. For instance, if in “Last Week in October” one changes four verbal forms from the present to the past (bold type in the passage below), removes the second line of the first stanza, and substitutes “along,” “above,” and “shortly” for “on,” “yon,” and “anon,” the poem could be interpolated between the second and third paragraphs of Chapter 7 of *The Woodlanders*:

Winterborne walked contemplatively behind them till all three were soon under the trees.
 [The trees **were** undressing, and **flung** in many places their radiant robes and ribbons and yellow laces; a leaf each second so is flung at will, here, there, another and another, still and still. A spider's web **had** caught one while downcoming, that **stayed** there

dangling when the rest **passed along**; like a suspended criminal hangs he, mumming in golden garb, while one yet green high **above**, trembles, as fearing such a fate **shortly** for himself.]

Although the time of bare boughs had now set in, there were sheltered hollows amid the Hintock plantations and copses in which a more tardy leave-taking than on windy summits was the rule with the foliage. (47)

The words “another and another, still and still” would make the poem be, as it will be shown in Chapter 2, just another lyrical passage in Hardy’s prose. But my intention here is not to force the poem into the prose passage but, rather, to suggest that some Hardyian poems show that there is indeed a strong and noticeable “commerce between” Hardy’s poetry and fiction (Lock 453). When comparing “Hardy’s poems in relation to his novels,” Lewis remarks:

We must notice first how very seldom his lyrics display that fresh, attentive and detailed description of natural objects which we find in the novels: the following stanza [from “At Rushy-Pond” (680)] is one of the rare exceptions:

And the wind flapped the moon in its float on the pool,
And stretched it to oval form;
Then corkscrewed it like a wriggling worm;
Then wanned it weariful.

Nor does Hardy attempt in verse those brilliant, sustained image-passages which stand out so memorably from his novels. (161)

Lewis is correct, but in Hardy’s poetry what impedes the sort of lyrical displays we find in his prose are some unavoidable genre constraints—length of line, metre, cadence, stress, rhyme—not any creative deficiency on Hardy’s part. Fresh, attentive and detailed descriptions of natural objects are difficult to bring about under these conditions.

Moreover, when Hardy describes nature in his poetry, he has to struggle not only with the limitations imposed by the genre but also with those imposed on his vocabulary by the theme chosen: i.e., the weather, flora, fauna, and geological characteristics of Wessex. It is surprising therefore to discover that of the 264 rhyme words Hardy uses in the sixteen nature poems only seventeen rhyme words directly related to nature (*around*, *on*, and *frock*, for instance, are not included) appear more than once: brown (392, 675), bush / bushes (445, 816), day (273, 421, 455), grass (421, 445, 583, 675), green / yellowy-green (424, 583; 455), pass (421, 445, 583,

675), place / places (392, 426, 673), rain (816, 825), row / rows (421, 426), show / shows (421, 426), sky / skies (274, 825), sound (275, 699), sway (392, 455), time (274, 445), to-day (392, 825), tree (273, 701), and underground (275, 421, 699). There is, to be sure, an internal, poetic continuity in the language and images used in the sixteen nature poems; for example, Hardy's distich "The sun frowns whitely in eye-trying flaps | through passing clouds-holes, mimicking audible taps" (825) echos that of poem 273 qualifying some October snows which "are as a half-transparent blind | riddled by rays from the sun behind;" or the reason why the vespering bird and the crocus in poem 275 know that the weather is going to change for the better; they rely on nature's seemingly saying "Better to-morrow!" in poem 825. But the noticeable small number of rhyme repetitions suggests that Hardy's nature poems are not simple variants of one another but rather distinct, well-balanced vignettes of different scenes drawn at specific moments.

In the Wessex of Hardy's sixteen nature poems one meets sunny days, fog, rain, wind, and snow; winters, springs, summers, and falls; light and shadows; moors, rivers, streams, eyots, and meads; swallows, finches, moorhens, sparrows, thrushes, robins, pigeons, nightingales, rooks, late, vespering, and song-birds; birches, pines, beeches, and willows ("eyot-whities"); croci, lilies, snowdrops, primroses, daisies, and kingcups; green, multicoloured, yellow, and pale brown leaves; barberries and myrtles; bees and honey, apples and cyder; sheep, neats, eels, and a homeless cat. The scope of the principal human concerns put forward in the poems, on the other hand, is limited and somewhat repetitious: longing and regret in combination with inclement weather, the inexorable passing of time and the changes this process brings forth, death, love's vicissitudes, and solitude. Nevertheless, though the variety of natural elements drawn and the number of lines given to the descriptions of nature are far more substantial than those given to any other theme, human concerns overshadow most descriptions of nature even when there seems to be no human trace in the poem. The nature that Hardy describes in his poetry is blind and unaware of anything else. The purpose of the descriptions seems to be to contrast this unawareness with the human concerns expressed in the poems. Nature is unaware of the poet's

existence, hence the poet stakes a claim: “clouds, mists, and mountains are unimportant beside the wear on a threshold, or the print of a hand.”

The opening and closing couplets of “An Unkindly May” are fewer in number than the five couplets of the intermediate stanza describing nature, but the location of the couplets, the repetition of the three rhyming words (smock, frock, flock), and the intense, still-life presence of a shepherd standing and counting his goats overpower the rest of the poem. What remains in the mind of the reader is not the description of the inclement weather or the struggle for survival of fauna and flora, but the powerful image of a shepherd holding a “gate ajar” while tending his flock, simply checking the number of sheep under his care; a man as oblivious to nature as nature is oblivious to him. In fact, in some instances even one single line of a Hardy nature poem can elicit a similar response from a reader. The last lines of “Growth in May” (“And *her* gown, as she waits for her Love”) and “Snow in the Suburbs” (“And we take him in”), for example, move the reader’s mind away from the description of nature towards the touching, emotionally appealing human aspect of the poem.

If one compares “A Spellbound Palace,” “Afterwards,” “Growth in May,” “Snow in the Suburbs,” and “An Unkindly May” the poems exemplify the difference that exists between nature poems and those which do not fulfill the conditions noted earlier in this chapter. Even though “Afterwards” and “An Unkindly May” are separated by 314 other poems in *CP* (511, 825), they both emphasise the importance of man over nature. A solitary shepherd and a poet, and what others will think about him, are more important than all the flora and fauna of Wessex. However, as Hynes notes: Hardy’s good poems

are made of the two constituents of private experience: sense data and consciousness itself. Hardy was an acute and precise observer of the physical world, and especially of small-scale nature — insects, drops of water on a gate, a leaf falling—no doubt because the world he *saw* was all the reality that he was sure of. (253)

And in those two constituents lies the lyricism one finds in Hardy's writing. Hardy describes the world he saw and the reality in which he believed with respect. "As, in looking at a carpet," Hardy wrote,

by following one colour a certain pattern is suggested, by following another colour, another; so in life the seer should watch that pattern among general things which his idiosyncrasy moves him to observe, and describe that alone. This is, quite accurately, a going to Nature; yet the result is no mere photograph, but purely the product of the writer's own mind. (*Life* 153)

Trees are set, grow, and disappear in Hardy's poetry ("Before and After Summer"), but leaves sprout, grow, fall, decay, and rot; and reversing the process that finches and nightingales undergo in "Proud Songsters," they become *particles of grain, and earth, and air, and rain*. Some of them, in fact, fall *still green* ("Night-Time in Mid-Fall") and *creep down dishevelled, some green, some yellow, and some pale brown* ("Where They Lived"). *October, mid-fall, later autumn* seem to be the crucial period for life, and leaves the closest simile to human destiny in Hardy's writing. If one reaches winter one has made it and may, with *feeble hope* ("Snow in the Suburbs") look forward to spring, like croci and vespering birds. The flora and fauna of Hardy's Wessex and its landscape may be on the whole imaginary, but their creator treats them with loving care and describes them with the art of a consummate writer, exactly as Hardy wished to be remembered.

CHAPTER 2

Poetic Lyricism in Hardy's Prose Descriptions of Nature

[O]ne of the many recommendations of Hardy's poetry is the sheer technical variety and thematic vision, and, given that Hardy moulded his feelings [into] verse, it is hardly surpris[ing] that many of the novels exhibit a peculiar lyrical quality.

Nicola Harris, "Fifty-Seven Poems," 69.

The lyricism of Hardy's prose is a well-established characteristic of Hardy's writings. Tim Dolin, for example, notes in his edition of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* that the novel

is full of remarkable vignettes, which have a kind of light and warmth all of their own: they stand out like small lyric poems (which in a way they are), of such intense interest to Hardy in themselves that they betray a certain reckless indifference to the whole of which they are supposedly a part. (xxxvi)

C. M. Bowra considers that "Hardy was always a poet, and, when he was not writing verse, he put his poetry into his novels and gave them a special distinction through it" (2). And Trevor Johnson states:

Now and then, so strong was the lyric impulse within [Hardy's], his prose will even deviate into or verge upon metrical form. In *Far from the Madding Crowd* (Chapter XXVIII) for example, we find,

Above the dark margin on the earth appeared
Foreshores and promontories of coppery cloud,
Bounding a green and pellucid expanse
In the western sky;

There are a further seven regular iambic lines to follow, in which the weather of the heroine Bathsheba's mind is mirrored by the skyscape, beautiful and ominous. (Johnson 98)

Jonathan Bracker versifies 158 of Hardy's prose passages in *A Little Patch of Shepherd's-Thyme: Prose Passages of Thomas Hardy Arranged As Verse* (2013). After reading a passage

from *The Return of the Native*, Bracker states, “I began to see what contributed to Hardy’s poetic prose passages.” Bracker continues:

Each tended to exhibit completeness. By that, I mean that often a single paragraph would be set aside for them, so that they were not buried in larger units, nor interrupted by less poetic sentences. Often they broke easily into equal units of two, three, or four lines, as though unconsciously Hardy had felt at the time in terms of stanzas instead of paragraphs. Often he used the poetic device of parallelism to create a repetition of rhythm. (8)⁵

One of the passages versified by Bracker is a description of nature in *Desperate Remedies* (*DR* 1871), Hardy’s first novel:

To See With Children’s Eyes

The day of their departure was one of the most glowing that the climax of
a long series of summer heats could evolve.
The wide expanse of landscape quivered up and down like the flame of a taper,
as they steamed along through the midst of it.

Placid flocks of sheep reclining under trees a little way off appeared of a pale
blue colour.

.
Glimpses of the sea now interested them, which became more and more frequent
till their train finally drew up beside the platform at Budmouth Regis.

Bracker 21, 9 sections in total; *DR* 21.

There is lyricism indeed in the passages that Bracker cites, but lengthy, elaborated prose descriptions of nature do not necessarily rhyme or have a metrical pattern and, simply breaking them into separate sentences does not versify the prose passage. Brief, lyrical passages, on the other hand, can be versified without difficulty because the lines are usually short and end with a pause in the format indicated by a punctuation mark, as shown by the excerpt from *Far from the Madding Crowd* (*FMC* 1874) versified by Johnson. In this chapter, I will isolate some of Hardy’s

⁵ Bracker arranges the poeticised passages in separate sections, in chronological order according to the prose work in which they appear. The book contains an “Editor’s Note” (6-10)—in which Bracker comments on Hardy’s poetic prose and lists eighteen of Hardy’s poems “which have similarities to the poetic prose selections” included in his book (10)—and an “Index Of Titles” (197-201). There is no reference to the edition(s) of the novels quoted.

prose descriptions of nature and versify them to make their lyricism stand out, as Bracker does, but I have not versified any of the passages included in his book.

As in a painting, the overall story told in literature is frequently far more important, and thus far more visible, than the details. If one is to appreciate the concealed art in the little corners of a canvas or a printed page and enjoy the intrinsic beauty of every detail no matter how humble the detail may seem, those areas need to be isolated and highlighted. Silent reading, for instance, obscures the aural qualities embedded in prose passages. The following excerpts from *Desperate Remedies*, *A Laodicean* (*L* 1881), *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *The Return of the Native* (*RN* 1878), and *Far from the Madding Crowd* illustrate this phenomenon.

Hardy's first mention and brief description of the natural world appears in the first date entry in Chapter 1, Volume I of *Desperate Remedies*. It takes place, appropriately for a novel writer still working at the office of an architect, in "a little conservatory on the landing":

there among the evergreens, by the light of a few tiny lamps, infinitely enhancing the freshness and beauty of the leaves, [Ambrose Graye, a young architect,] made the declaration of a love as fresh and beautiful as they. (*DR* 8)

This passage versified would read:

There among the evergreens,
by the light of a few tiny lamps,
infinitely enhancing the freshness
and beauty of the leaves,
he made the declaration of a love
as fresh and beautiful as they.

This sort of brief lyrical description of telling natural details—"the evergreens," "the freshness and beauty of the leaves"—interwoven with emotional and architectural elements—"declaration of a love," "a little conservatory on the landing"—are very common in Hardy's prose. It is important to notice that it is Hardy's brief description of nature, rather than nature itself, what reflects, or responds to both what is happening in the narrative and the state of mind of the characters at that moment.

My versification

Readings from
the original text

A lavender *haze hung* in the air,
the trees were as still
as those of a submarine forest;

while the sun,
in colour like a brass plaque,
had a hairy outline in the livid sky.

(L 129; my italics)

The journey was *along* a road
by *neutral green hills*,
upon which hedgerows
lay trailing like ropes on a quay.

Gaps in these uplands revealed
the *blue sea*,
flecked with a few dashes of white
and a *solitary white sail*,

the *whole* brimming up
to a keen horizon
which *lay like a line ruled*
from *hillside to hillside*.

(PBE 181; my italics)

There the form stood,
motionless as the hill beneath.
Above the plain rose the hill,
above the hill rose the barrow,

above the barrow rose the figure,
above the figure was nothing
that could be mapped elsewhere
than on a celestial globe.

[figure.]
[Above]

(RN 17)

Right and left of the path were
first a bed of gooseberry-bushes,
 next of currant,
 next of raspberry,
 next of strawberry,
next of old-fashioned flowers.

(W 102)

The thin grasses,
more or less coating the hill,
were touched by the wind

in breezes of differing powers,

and almost of differing natures –
 one rubbing the blades heavily,
 another raking them piercingly,
 another brushing them
 like a soft broom.

(*FMC* 14)

Note the rhythmical repetition of sounds (alliteration) in the passages from *A Laodicean* (“haze hung | had a hairy”) and, in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, the *ōs*, *ls*, *ās*, and *ss*, of the words “road . . . hedgerows lay trailing like ropes” (*rōd* . . . *hej/rōs lā trāling līk rōps*) and “lay like a line ruled.” (The excerpt has fifteen *ls* and three *ll*’s.) Note also the four-time repetitions of the words “above the” and “next of” in the passages from *The Return of the Native* and *The Woodlanders*, and of “another” and the four present participles used in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (differing, rubbing, raking, brushing).

The following versification of three short excerpts from *The Trumpet-Major* (*TM* 1880) and *A Laodicean* are good examples of how versification brings out some of the characteristics that imbue Hardy’s prose passages with lyrical overtones.

The panes of the grinding-room, [the panes]
now as heretofore
 clouded with flour as with stale hoar-frost;
 the meal lodged in the corners of the window-sills,
 forming a soil in which lichens grew
without ever getting any bigger,
 as they had done since their dimmest infancy; [since his]
 the mosses on the plinth towards the river,
 reaching as high as the capillary power of the walls
 would fetch up moisture for their nourishment,
 and the penned mill-pond,
now as ever
 on the point of overflowing into the garden.
Everything was the same.

(*TM* 120; my italics)

The *old* mosses [and the old]
 with which the walls were padded– [they were]
 mosses that *from time immemorial*
 had been burnt brown *every summer*,
 and *every winter* had grown green *again*.

(*L* 25; my italics)

It was the darkest of November weather,
 when the days are so short that morning
 seems to join with evening
 without the intervention of noon.

The sky was lined with low cloud,
 within whose dense substance
 tempests were slowly fermenting for the coming days.
 Even now
 a windy turbulence troubled the half-naked boughs,
 and a lonely leaf would occasionally spin down-wards
 to rejoin on the grass the scathed multitude of its comrades
 which had preceded it in its fall.

The brook by the pavilion,
 in the summer so *clear and purling*,
 now slid onwards *brown and thick and silent*,
 and enlarged to double size.

(L 209; my italics)

Nature changes with the passing of time. *Old* mosses change *from time immemorial* from *every summer's* brown to *every winter's* green over and over *again* (L 25). Lichens grow *without ever getting any bigger* and the mill-pond is *now as ever* about to invade the garden, *now as heretofore* everything is the same (TM 120). The brook so *clear and purling* in the summer slides now, in the darkness of November weather, *brown, thick and silent* but, no doubt, it will once again purl and run clear next summer (L 209). Sound and silence are two elements that play an important role in Hardy's writings: *purling* and *silent* for example (L 209), or the effect that human stirring has on the doings of owls, rabbits, and stoats:

Owls that had been catching mice in the outhouses,
 rabbits that had been eating the winter-greens in the garden,
 and stoats that had been sucking the blood of the rabbits,
 discerning that their human neighbours were on the move
 discreetly withdrew from publicity,
 and were seen and heard no more till nightfall.

(W 22)

The following excerpt from *Under the Greenwood Tree* (UGT 1872) is a good example of Hardy's use of sound:

Beyond their own slight noises
 nothing was to be heard
 save the occasional bark of foxes. [beyond]

These three very short lines appear immediately after the following passage:

whatever ye do, keep from making a great scuffle on the ground when we go in at people's gates; but go quietly . . . The breeze had gone down, and the rustle of their feet and tones of their speech echoed with an alert rebound from every post, boundary-stone and ancient wall they passed, even where the distance of the echo's origin was less than a few yards. (*UGT* 29)

The entire passage has three of the elements that characterise many of Hardy's descriptions of nature: (1) silence and noise described with different words ("great scuffle," "quietly," "rustle of their feet," "tones of their speech," "echoed with alert rebound," "slight noises," "heard," "bark"), (2) the wind plays an important role in the description (the breeze goes down so that other noises may be heard), and (3) near-half-rhyme words (noises / foxes).

The following passage in "The Waiting Supper," one of Hardy's short stories, has: (1) the words "voice" and "sound," (2) the implied idea of silence ("lost their voice"), and (3) the possibility ("if there was still a sound") of some noise ("the cascade of a stream").⁶

The small stars filled in between the larger,
the nebulae between the small stars,
the trees quite lost their voice;
and if there was still a sound,

it was from the cascade of a stream
which stretched
along under the trees
that bounded the lawn on its northern side.

(*CSS* 589)

The sentence "the trees quite lost their voice" also suggests stillness in the air, no wind, no breeze playing with the foliage. The following passage in *The Major of Casterbridge* shows the importance that the wind has in Hardy's descriptions involving natural sounds/natural music:

The whole was grown over with grass, [the]
which now, at the end of the summer,

⁶ All references to Hardy's short stories are to *Thomas Hardy: Collected Short Stories (CSS)* and *The Excluded and Collaborative Stories (ECS)*. Three other short descriptions appear in *ECS*, 299-300, 318, and 311-12. For another collection of Hardy's short stories see, *The Supernatural Tales of Thomas Hardy (ST)*.

was bearded with withered bents
 that formed waves under the brush of the wind,
 returning to the attentive ear Æolian modulation. [modulation,]
 (MC 69)

Only seven descriptions of nature of any substantial length appear in all of Hardy's short stories. Three of them, "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four," "The Honourable Laura," and "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress," are of particular interest because sounds are an important element of the narrative.

It was one of those very still nights when, if you stand on the high hills anywhere within two or three miles of the sea, you can hear the rise and fall of the tide along the shore, coming and going every few moments like a sort of great snore of the sleeping world. (CSS 31)

a smack-smack upon the projecting ledges of rock – at first louder and heavier than that of the brook, and then scarcely to be distinguished from it – then a cessation, then the splashing of the stream as before, and the accompanying murmur of the sea, were all the incidents that disturbed the customary flow of the lofty waterfall. (CSS 363)

A hazy light spread through the air, the landscape [. . .] being enlivened and lit up by the spirit of an unseen sun rather than by its direct rays. Every sound could be heard for miles. There was a great crowing of cocks, bleating of sheep, and cawing of rooks, which proceeded from all points of the compass, rising and falling as the origin of each sound was near or far away. There were also audible the voices of people in the village, interspersed with hearty laughs, the bell of a distant flock of sheep, a robin close at hand, vehicles in the neighbouring roads and lanes. One of these latter noises grew gradually more distinct, and proved itself to be rapidly nearing the school. (ECS 90-91)

These three short passages further illustrate how Hardy's descriptions introduce or prepare a scene, reflecting on, or responding to the tone of the narrative, underlining its content or contrasting it. The shepherd of the first passage, a consummate storyteller, is setting the stage for a momentous happening in his life, his finding himself hidden that night in a thatched makeshift hurdle just a few yards away from Napoleon, where one "can hear the rise and fall of the tide . . . like a sort of great snore of the sleeping world." The text that follows the nature passage quoted from "The Honourable Laura," where Signor Smittozzi sends Captain Northbrook "reeling over" the cliff in his attempt to kill him, echos the impact of the noise of the cascade and continues the nature description of what for an instant had been disturbed: "the

customary flow of the lofty waterfall, . . . the splashing of the stream as before, and the accompanying murmur of the sea.” On the other hand, in the passage from “An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress,” sounds dominate the narrative. The view on which Egbert Mayne’s “eyes were resting” turns suddenly into a space where every “sound could be heard for miles,” leading, unerringly, to Egbert’s hearing and singling out the noise of the carriage of his idolized Geraldine Allenville as it reaches the door of his school. These three descriptions not only support the narrative they also function either in contrast to, or in sync with the moods and the actions of the characters.

Lengthier descriptions of the natural world usually open a formal section of the narrative, setting the stage and mood for what will follow, like the passage from Chapter 7 of *The Woodlanders* quoted above (pp. 20-21), and may also serve as an empathetic instrument to continue and/or contrast the mood set in the preceding narrative. The first occurrence of this stylistic device in Hardy’s prose appears at the opening of Chapter 2, Volume 1 of *Desperate Remedies*. (Bold letters denote the description of nature.)

The day of [Owen’s and Cytherea’s] departure was one of the most glowing that the climax of a long series of summer heats could evolve. The wide expanse of landscape quivered up and down like the flame of a taper, as they steamed along through the midst of it. Placid flocks of sheep reclining under trees a little way off appeared of a pale blue colour. Clover fields were livid with the brightness of the sun upon their deep red flowers. All waggons and carts were moved to the shade by their careful owners; rain-water butts fell to pieces; well-buckets were lowered inside the covers of the well-hole, to preserve them from the fate of the butts, and generally, water seemed scarcer in the country than the beer and cider of the peasantry who toiled or idled there.

To see persons looking with children’s eyes at any ordinary scenery, is a proof that they possess the charming faculty of drawing new sensations from an old experience—a healthy sign, rare in these feverish days—the mark of an imperishable brightness of nature.

Both brother and sister could do this; Cytherea more noticeably. They watched **the undulating corn-lands, monotonous to all their companions; the stony and clayey prospect succeeding those, with its angular and abrupt hills. Boggy moors came next, now withered and dry—the spots upon which pools usually spread their waters, showing themselves as circles of smooth bare soil, over-run by a net-work of innumerable little fissures. Then arose plantations of firs, abruptly terminating beside meadows cleanly mown, in which high-hipped, rich-coloured cows, with backs horizontal and straight as the ridge of a house, stood motionless or lazily fed. Glimpses of the sea now interested them, which became more and more frequent till the train finally drew up beside the platform at Creston. (DR 21)**

The calm, bucolic state of nature described in the first and third paragraphs contrasts markedly with the sadness and misgivings that brother and sister feel in the preceding chapter, after the death of their father in a tragic accident and their rush to leave their native town to escape the gossiping of their neighbors. It seems that Hardy's two main purposes in the middle paragraph of the passage are to show that brother and sister are together and safe, and to stress the "imperishable brightness of nature." Both siblings enjoy and appreciate the beauty of the landscape being described by Hardy, "Cytherea more noticeably."

Another such opening description appears at the start of Chapter XVI of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (TU 1891) to introduce the harvest episode of the novel. The first paragraph of the passage may be versified:

It was a hazy sunrise in August.
The denser nocturnal vapours,
 attacked by the warm beams,
were dividing and shrinking into isolated fleeces
within hollows and coverts, where they waited
till they should be dried away to nothing.

The sun, on account of the mist, had a curious, sentient, personal look, demanding the masculine pronoun for its adequate expression. His present aspect, coupled with the lack of all human forms in the scene, explained 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, godlike creature, gazing down in the vigour and intentness of youth upon an earth that was brimming with interest for him. (TU 92)

No wind, waves, rain, nor even a cloud disturbs the placidness of nature. The sun, god-like male dominates the passage in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. In *Desperate Remedies*, the landscape simply "quivered up and down like the flame of a taper" revealing equable: "flocks of sheep reclining under trees" and clover "fields . . . livid with the brightness of the sun upon their deep red flowers" on which "high-hipped, rich-coloured cows . . . stood motionless or lazily fed." The only discordant sign seems to be the unusual dryness of the season: "water seemed scarcer in the country" but "beer and cider" were not as scarce. Without the lines interpolated in the middle of the passage and two minor changes at the beginning of the first paragraph and at the beginning and ending of the third paragraph, the entire description of nature could stand on its own.

The wind is not an infrequent or an unimportant visitor in Hardy's descriptions of nature. As the wind besets Giles Winterborne's house, for example,

[it] grew more violent, and as the storm went on it was difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only an invisible colourless thing was trampling and climbing over the roof, making branches creak, springing out of the trees upon the chimney, popping its head into the flue; and shrieking and blaspheming at every corner of the wall. (*W* 277)

Or in Chapter IV of *Tess of d'Urbervilles*:

. . . the occasional heave of the wind
became the sigh
of some immense sad soul,
conterminous with the universe in space,
and with history in time. (*TU* 36)

Hardy's vignettes are an integral part of the passages where they appear, of course, but they could also stand on their own as brief lyrical descriptions of natural scenes.

Speaking of *Far from the Madding Crowd* (*FMC* 1874) in *Thomas Hardy: The Poetic Structure* Jean R. Brooks comments: "There is hardly a scene, a character, or an image which has not its reflections on either side of the central crisis. It is characteristic of Hardy that their poetic force is carried by the relationship of character to their environment" (161). This powerful relationship and the important role that silence and sound/music play at the invitation of the wind in Hardy's descriptions of nature is typical of Hardy's writings. So much so, that it is difficult to enumerate the many disguises that the wind assumes in Hardy's works. It could be just a desolate midnight wind or a draft that changes names and speeds as it goes along causing all sorts of harmonies or mayhem:

It was nearly midnight on the eve of St Thomas', the shortest day in the year. A desolating wind wandered from the north over the hill. . . .

Norcombe Hill—forming part of Norcombe Ewelease, and lying to the north-east of the little town of Emminster—was one of the spots which suggest to a passer-by that he is in the presence of a shape approaching the indestructible as nearly as any to be found on earth. It was a featureless convexity of chalk and soil—an ordinary specimen of those smoothly outlined protuberances of the globe which may remain undisturbed on some great day of confusion when far grander heights and dizzy granite precipices topple down.

The hill was covered on its northern side by an ancient and decaying plantation of beeches whose upper verge formed a line over the crest fringing its arched curve against the sky, like a mane. To-night, these trees sheltered the southern slope from the keenest

blasts, which smote the wood and floundered through it with a sound as of grumbling, or gushed over its crowning boughs in a weakened moan. The dry leaves in the ditch simmered and boiled in the same breezes, a tongue of air occasionally ferreting out a few, and sending them spinning across the grass. A group or two of the latest in date amongst the dead multitude had remained till this very mid-winter time on the twigs which bore them, and in falling rattled against the trunks with smart taps.

Between this half-wooded, half-naked hill and the vague still horizon that its summit indistinctly commanded was a mysterious sheet of fathomless shade—the sounds from which suggested that what it concealed bore some reduced resemblance to features here. The thin grasses, more or less coating the hill, were touched by the wind in breezes of differing powers, and almost of differing natures—one rubbing the blades heavily, another raking them piercingly, another brushing them like a soft broom. The instinctive act of human-kind was to stand, and listen, and learn how the trees on the right and the trees on the left wailed or chanted to each other in the regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir; how hedges and other shapes to leeward then caught the note, lowering it to the tenderest sob; and how the hurrying gust then plunged into the south to be heard no more. (*FMC* 14-15)

The two paragraphs that follow this description in *Far from the Madding Crowd* concern the universe and, Hardy concludes, “[a]fter such a nocturnal reconnoitre it is hard to get back to earth, and to believe that the consciousness of such majestic speeding is derived from a tiny human frame.”

Suddenly an unexpected series of sounds began to be heard in this place up against the sky. They had a clearness which was to be found nowhere in the wind, and a sequence which was to be found nowhere in nature. They were the notes of Farmer Oak’s flute. (*FMC* 15)

I quote this lengthy passage in full because Hardy encapsulates in it (1) most of the elements that characterise his descriptions of nature, (2) many of the names the wind takes and the functions it serves in his writings, and (3) some of the roles that humans play in both the world and his fiction. The first and second paragraphs quoted give the time, date, and geological characteristics of the terrain, and identify the precise place and general area where the narrative takes place. The third and fourth paragraphs describe nature. As for the “desolating wind,” it is also a blast, breeze, air, and gust. It wanders, smites, flounders, gushes, ferrets, sends across, touches, rubs, rakes, brushes, and plunges. With the three instruments at its disposal (trees, leaves, and grasses) the wind produces “sounds,” “grumbling,” moans, rattling, wailing, chanting, choral “antiphonies,” musical notes, and sobs. It makes the leaves simmer, boil, spin, and fall. It interacts with flora and geological features. It talks them into whispering and singing their

message so that it may carry it with its differing powers and almost differing natures towards “a mysterious sheet of fathomless shade.” And the wind, of course, is what carries the notes of Farmer Oak’s flute “up against the sky” even though, being produced by “a small dark object,” the “tune was not floating unhindered into the open air.”

The presence of humanity is consistent throughout these two lengthy passages but it becomes marginal if one separates Hardy’s brief references to humankind (date, hour, locations) from Hardy’s detailed descriptions of nature. Hardy acknowledges its existence but stresses its smallness when compared to the beauty and magnificence of the universe. And, yet, “drawing new sensations from an old experience” and the notes of a human flute override Hardy’s two full pages of prose. With a few minor changes, the first six lines of the chapter could be run together with the paragraph that introduces Farmer Oak’s playing the flute without in the least disrupting the narrative.

The same may be said about the passage that opens Chapter 2, Volume 1 in *Desperate Remedies* quoted in p. 33.

The day of their departure was one of the most glowing that the climax of a long series of summer heats could evolve. To see persons looking with children’s eyes at any ordinary scenery [during their trip], is a proof that they possess the charming faculty of drawing new sensations from an old experience—a healthy sign, rare in these feverish days—the mark of an imperishable brightness of nature. Both brother and sister could do this; Cytherea more noticeably. Glimpses of the sea now interested them, which became more and more frequent till the train finally drew up beside the platform at Creston.

The intermediate paragraph of the passage could open the chapter leaving the description of nature aside. The “[o]rdinary scenery” drawn in *Desperate Remedies* and the majesty of the universe described in *Far from the Madding Crowd* are multifaceted and imposing but they are nonetheless the creation of the mind of a “tiny human frame.” These statements seem to contradict one another, but they do not. On the one hand they show Hardy’s respect for both humanity and nature and the delicate balance that exists between them, on the other, they stress the importance of the minor role that humanity plays in the universe. The “Æolian modulations” are, once again, in the background, and one must pay close attention if one wants to sense them.

In other words, one must separate Hardy's description of nature and natural phenomena from Hardy's fiction to capture the values intrinsic to each of them.

The brief passages that describe the windstorm that takes place in Chapter XVI of *Two on a Tower* follow:

the two and -thirty winds of heaven continued as before to beat about the tower, though their onsets appeared to be somewhat lessening in force. . . . [But} a a circular hurricane, exceeding in violence any that had preceded it, seized hold upon Rings-Hill Speer at that moment with the determination of a conscious agent; . . . then the wind, which hitherto [Viviette and Swithin] had heard rather than felt, rubbed past them like a fugitive. . . . The dome that had covered the tower had been whirled off bodily, and they heard it descend crashing upon the trees. . . . Having executed its grotesque purpose the wind sank to comparative mildness. . . . [S]houts occasionally mingled with the wind, which retained some violence yet, playing over the trees beneath [Viviette] as on the strings of a lyre . . . while overhead the windy sky looked down with a strange and disguised face. (*TT* 106-8.

Under the brush of the breeze, leaves may also resolve into musical sounds: as Mr. Melbury and Grace “stepped out in a direction towards the densest quarter of the wood,” writes Hardy, “Winterborne followed and kept his eye upon” them:

They dived amid beeches under which nothing grew,
the younger boughs still retaining their hectic leaves,
that rustled in the breeze with a sound almost metallic,
like the sheet-iron foliage of the fabled Jarnvid wood.

(*W* 47-48)

The five-stress rhythms (-/-/---/-/?-/-/-/-/-/?-/-/-/-/-/?-/-/-/-/-/?-/-/-/-/-/?), the sound and thematic insistence of some words (*hectic*, *metallic*; *foliage*, *fabled*; *beeches*, *boughs*, *leaves*, *breeze*, *foliage*, *wood*), the length of the four-stopped lines, and the consistent use of short one- and two-syllable word (only three trisyllabic words occur: *retaining*, *metallic*, and *foliage*) give fluidity to the description and suggest to the ear an internal rhyme and the metre of Alexandrine verse.

Hardy's characters mention silences and sounds occasionally: “you can hear the rise and fall of the tide along the shore, coming and going every few moments like a sort of great snore of the sleeping world” (*CSS* 31), but five of the short passages quoted above show that it is Hardy who notices and points out silences and sounds more often than his characters. The sustained description of nature that appears in Chapter VI of *The Return of the Native* reads:

It might reasonably have been supposed that she was listening to the wind, which rose somewhat as the night advanced, and laid hold of the attention. The wind, indeed, seemed made for the scene, as the scene seemed made for the hour. Part of its tone was quite special; what was heard there could be heard nowhere else. Gusts in innumerable series followed each other from the north-west, and when each one of them raced past the sound of its progress resolved into three. Treble, tenor and bass notes were to be found therein. The general ricochet of the whole over pits and prominences had the gravest pitch of the chime. Next there could be heard the baritone buzz of a holly tree. Below these in force, above them in pitch, a dwindled voice strove hard at a husky tune – which was the peculiar local sound alluded to. Thinner and less immediately traceable than the other two, it was far more impressive than either. In it lay what may be called the linguistic peculiarity of the heath; and being audible nowhere on earth off a heath it afforded a shadow of reason for the woman's tenseness, which continued as unbroken as ever.

Throughout the blowing of these plaintive November winds, that note bore a great resemblance to the ruins of human song which remain to the throat of fourscore and ten. It was a worn whisper, dry and papery, and it brushed so distinctly across the ear that, by the accustomed, the material minutiae in which it originated could be realized as by touch. It was the united products of infinitesimal vegetable causes, and these were neither stems nor twigs, neither leaves nor fruit, neither blades nor prickles, neither lichen nor moss.

They were the mummied heath-bells of the past summer, originally tender and purple, now washed colourless by Michaelmas rains, and dried to dead skins by October suns. So low was an individual sound from these that a combination of hundreds only just emerged from silence, and the myriads of the whole declivity reached the woman's ear but as a shrivelled and intermittent recitative. Yet scarcely a single accent among the many afloat to-night could have such power to impress a listener with thoughts of its origin. One inwardly saw the infinity of those combined multitudes: one perceived that each of the tiny trumpets was seized on, entered, scoured, and emerged from by the wind as thoroughly as if it were as vast as a crater. (*RN 54-55; my italics*)

In *Remembering and the Sounds of Words* Adam Piette examines in detail two passages from this section of the novel. Thomas Hardy, he notes,

was expert at demonstrating what might be termed sonic pathetic fallacy, a supersensitive hearing of resonance between the 'sounds' of external and internal nature. These sound-resemblances go to the heart of his sensitivity to the discrete mystery of hidden or buried feelings. Like analysis of the play of facial features, the registering of complex, miniature shifts in sound-values is of enormous importance to his craft as a novelist. (25)

Piette quotes the following sentence: "They were the mummified heath-bells of the past summer, originally tender and purple, now washed colourless by Michaelmas rains, and dried to dead skins by October suns," and observes: "The para-rhymes 'rains', 'skins', 'suns', knit together a combination of sound-repetitions (k, m, d, s) and an audible rhythm (two five-stress phrases from

‘now’ to ‘suns’)” (26). One could, perhaps, add to this series of sound repetitions “mummified,” “summer,” “Michaelmas,” “dried,” and “dead.”

The other *Return of the Native* passage examined by Piette is:

The bluffs, and the bushes, and the heather-bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse as theirs. Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them flew away.

What she uttered was a lengthened sighing, apparently at something in her mind which had led to her presence here.

As Piette notes: “Hardy’s prose seems to be remembering poetry.” Piette continues:

—‘Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them flew away’: //--/’--///--’-/-/-. The three-stress rhythms and the sound effects giving hints of rhyme (‘winds’-’twined in with’-‘away’), seduce the ear into reminiscences of a metrical form:

Thrown out on the winds
It became twined in with them
And with them flew away

Eustacia’s sigh is caught up by the winds and transformed into invisible power; the voice that narrates her and her sounds is similarly caught up by the impulses of his poetic memory and transformed into rhythm and rhyme. (26-27)

Piette’s detailed argument on Hardy’s passages is convincing and his conclusions seem incontrovertible, but there are some textual variants between the Gindin edition he used (1969 Norton Critical Edition) and the Oxford edition I am using. (Bold type indicates differences between the quotations in Piette and the Oxford edition.)

They were the **mummied** heath-bells of the past summer, originally tender and purple, now washed colourless by Michaelmas rains, and dried to dead skins by October suns. (RN 55)

The bluffs **had broken silence**, the bushes **had broken silence**, the heather-bells had broken silence; at last, so did the woman; and her articulation was but as another phrase of the same discourse as theirs. Thrown out on the winds it became twined in with them, and with them **it** flew away.

What she uttered was a lengthened sighing, apparently at something in her mind which had led to her presence here. (RN 56)

This edition of *The Return of the Native* . . . excludes many of Hardy's revisions, and the reasons for this divergence from accepted practice are of more than technical interest. . . . Though Hardy's evocation of the heath is so remarkable that no tampering of this kind can ultimately spoil his achievement, the heath has lost a part of its mystery, and I hold these changes to be a perversion by Hardy of a central aspect of his original conception, made under the compelling pressure of a purpose quite unformulated when he wrote the novel. This edition offers readers a text which shows what it really means to say that *The Return of the Native* is a novel of 1878. (xxviii, xxxi)

I will base my commentary on the text of the Gatrell edition.

Some sounds in the passage quoted above do indeed give "hints of rhyme . . . and seduce the ear into reminiscences of a metrical form." There are rhetorical figures: anaphora ("had broken silence" / "had broken silence" / "had broken silence"), sound repetition ("bluffs broken / bushes broken / bells broken"), a hint of a pause in the middle of the line ("with them it flew away"), and a caesura ("Suddenly, on the barrow, there") in the Gatrell edition. And there are also different modulations of "silence" and "sound:" ("rhetoric of night" / "discourse" / "sighing" / "uttered"). The passages respond to Piette's purpose admirably, but the deletion of two "had broken silence," a comma, "it," and the period at the end of the last line of the passage set as verse by Piette takes away some of the sounds he is describing in his writing. The replacement of two "had broken silence" by repeating the word *and* twice is unlikely to have been made by Hardy. Three-time repetitions are a lyrical characteristic of his writing.

My comments, however, do not diminish in the least the value of Piette's observations. They strengthen them. Piette's versification is helpful because it shows that setting long lines of prose as short lines of poetry forces the mind to notice nuances of diction and sound, see and be aware of word choice, and hear phonemes and word-rhythms which otherwise might have passed unnoticed.

Moreover, Piette demonstrates in his "Introduction" that Hardy's descriptions of nature have all the key elements one assigns to poetry. Versifying the entire passage would transform it into the description of an orchestral performance before an audience. The appropriate elements

are scattered throughout the passage: “listening,” “scene,” “tone,” “heard,” “innumerable series,” “sound,” “Treble, tenor and bass notes,” “ricochet,” “pitch of the chime,” “baritone buzz,” “a dwindled voice strove hard at a husky tune,” “audible,” “human song,” “whisper,” “ear,” “united products,” so “low was an individual sound from these that a combination of hundreds only just emerged from silence,” “the woman’s ear,” “a single accent among the many afloat,” “listener,” “combined multitudes,” “tiny trumpets.”

And if one imagines the “wind” as the conductor, the “Gusts” as notes, the “pits and prominences” as orchestra pit and galleries, and the “holly-tree” as “euphonium,” the whole passage could be contemplated as the performance of a musical piece—“the united [product] of infinitesimal vegetable causes, . . . neither stems nor twigs, neither leaves nor fruit, neither blades nor prickles, neither lichen nor moss” (55)—where the conductor is inviting with his baton the still silent instruments to join, one by one, those other instruments already playing, until one group of string instruments breaks the silence, and another, and another, and a soft tap to the triangle concludes the symphony. The *she* of the first line quoted is indeed “listening to the wind,” tensely waiting through one and a half pages of text for her turn to break the silence of her instrument, and let the wind carry her sigh away with it, along with the soft sounds of all the other instruments. Her cue to break her “tenseness,” which had “continued as unbroken as ever” during her long waiting, was the bluffs, bushes, and the bells of the heather breaking “silence at last.” The orchestral performance staged by nature in *The Return of the Native* mirrors Eustacia’s “extraordinary fixity, her conspicuous loneliness, her heedlessness of night, betokening among other things an utter absence of fear” (54). Just as the bluffs, the bushes, and the heather-bells are prepared to break silence at the will of the wind, Eustacia’s brain utters a sound “it could not regulate. [. . . She] had been existing in a suppressed state, [like the nature around her,] and not in any languor or stagnation” (55). And, as in the case of the taking in of a “wide-eyed and thin” cat in “Snow in the Suburbs,” a shepherd “counting his flock” in “An Unkindly May,” and the “unexpected series of sounds” of farmer Oak’s flute in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, which overpower the descriptions of nature that precede them, so does Eustacia’s articulation.

Hardy describes another orchestral arrangement in Chapter XXXVII, “The Storm: The Two Together,” of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, a chamber performance for light, drum, and gong. The entire piece can be quoted as a list of the moments in which lightning illuminates the scene followed by the sounds that the various instruments produce:

Score for “The Storm: Light and Sound Together”

First move. A light flapping over the scene [as if reflected from phosphorescent wings crossing the sky] and a rumble filling the air.

[. . . *pause* . . .]

Second [flash]. Comparatively little visible light. A noisy peal.

[. . . *pause* . . .]

Third flash. Lightning the colour of silver gleaming in the heavens. Rumbles become rattles. Intense darkness.

[. . . *pause* . . .]

Fourth of the larger flashes. A blue light in the zenith flickering down in some indescribable manner. [A moment later] a smack—smart, clear, and short.

[. . . *pause* . . .]

Fifth flash. Green as an emerald. A shout, reverberation stunning.

[. . . *pause* . . .]

Sixth flash. A brazen glare of shining majolica from the east. The peal’s diabolical sound followed by a secondary flash in the west.

[. . . *pause* . . .]

Next flash. [. . . Silence everywhere for four or five minutes . . .] A burst of light from east, west, north, south intertwined with undulating green snakes. Behind, a broad mass of lesser light from every part of the tumbling sky. A blast [harsh and pitiless in a dead, flat blow, without that reverberation which lends the tones of a drum to more distant thunder. Then total silence and impenetrable darkness.]

[. . . *pause* . . .]

An incessant light, frequent repetition [of light] melting into complete continuity as an unbroken sound results from the successive strokes on a gong.

(*FMC* 244-7; my adaptation. See Appendix 4.)

There seems to be a deliberate stage arrangement for an audiovisual performance in this passage. The opening light and rumble are characterised as the *first move* of the composition. The intensity of the audiovisual effect increases in a crescendo from flapping/rumble to burst/blast as the performance advances, turns into total silence and impenetrable darkness, and ends softly in the distance. A “harsh and pitiless” blast and the near blinding flash that runs “invisibly down [Gabriel’s rod], down the chain, and into the earth” (246) melt into the complete and unbroken continuity of sound and light that leads to Gabriel’s reassuring and grateful “Nothing serious. . . . I cannot understand no rain falling. But Heaven be praised, it is all the better for us” (247). Rain,

of course, would have dampened the audiovisual performance. It would have distracted and drowned the attention of the audience.

Unlike the uninterrupted description of nature in *The Return of the Native* quoted above, the passage from *Far from the Madding Crowd* contains a series of isolated light and sound stage notations interpolated within the narrative proper. There is something arresting about the variable and increasing intensity of lightning, noise, silence, and darkness in the performance. Just as Hardy's short descriptions of nature "stand out like small lyric poems" (*PBE*, xxxvi), Hardy's lengthy prose descriptions of nature stand out as long lyric musical performances. But they need to be isolated, their physical form streamed for their musical undertones to stand out.

In "The Issue of Hardy's Poetry," Robert Langbaum states that he wants "to distinguish between Hardy's poems and novels, to argue for the great novels as his most consistently major work, containing, albeit in prose, his most massively major poetry" (*An Historical Evaluation*, 301). And in *Thomas Hardy in Our Time* he suggests that "*The Return of the Native* is Hardy's greatest nature poem," but not because of its poetic qualities but rather because "Hardy achieves the imaginative freedom and intensity of great poetry by daring to make the heath the novel's central character" (64). Clark questions the validity of Langbaum's first sentence:

I do not wish to dismiss the [chapter] out of hand, yet I take issue with the designation of one of Hardy's novels as his greatest nature poem. Hardy, of course, wrote over nine hundred poems, many of which could be described as 'nature poems'. From these, Langbaum could, I am sure, easily have chosen one he deemed to be the 'greatest'. As good a novel as *The Return of the Native* is, it is not Hardy's greatest nature poem simply because it is not a poem. (Clark 8)

I find it somewhat difficult not to sympathize with Langbaum's statement, but leaving aside the obvious genre differences that exist between a poem and a novel, the heath is not the principal character of the novel, nor would its being make *The Return of the Native* a nature poem. "Mr Hardy's passionate love of Nature is sunk into him," noted an earlier critic:

Only a poet could have put Egdon Heath so wonderfully into *The Return of the Native*, only a poet could have described the thunderstorm of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Yet, being a true novelist, the scenery is with Mr Hardy only a fine setting. Not the heath, but those who cross it, are his subjects. (61)⁷

One should conclude from these critical points of view that Langbaum's suggestions are untenable. The two passages from *The Return of the Native* and *Far from the Madding Crowd* quoted above, if isolated, could stand as verse paragraphs of two odes to the power and beauty of nature's melodies, but neither *The Return of the Native* nor *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a nature poem nor is nature their principal character.

"Like *Far from the Madding Crowd*," writes Douglas Brown in *Thomas Hardy, The Woodlanders* "tells of the choice between agricultural life and the lure of the town" (71). But in both novels the descriptions of nature outnumber town descriptions. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, on the other hand, "the lure of the town" takes precedence over the countryside. Nature is less prominent. It becomes the frame rather than the painting:

To birds of the more soaring kind
Casterbridge must have appeared
 on this fine evening
as a mosaic-work of subdued reds,
 browns, greys,
and crystals, held together
by a rectangular frame of deep green. (27)

And there are musical performances, but they are no longer carried out by a few instruments or by an entire orchestra, but rather by one instrument alone, water flowing:

To the east of Casterbridge lay moors and meadows,
 through which much water flowed.

 The wanderer in this direction,
who should stand still for a few moments on a quiet night,
 might hear singular symphonies from these waters,
 as from a lampless orchestra,

⁷ Quoted by R. P. Draper in an extract from James M. Barrie's article "Thomas Hardy: The Historian of Wessex," *Contemporary Review*, 56, 1889.

all playing in their sundry tones,
from near and far parts of the moor.

At a hole in a rotten weir they executed a recitative,
where a tributary brook fell over a stone breastwork
they trilled cheerily;
under an arch they performed a metallic cymbaling;
and at Durnover-Hole they hissed.

The spot at which their instrumentation rose loudest
was a place called Ten-Hatches,
whence during high springs there proceeded a very fugue of sounds. (275-6)

The Mayor of Casterbridge, states Andrew Enstice in *Thomas Hardy: Landscapes of the Mind*, “is one novel in a developing line; but it is notable both for the perfection of its form – the form that traps – and for the fact that it marks the end of the novel of harmonious landscape” (1). Notwithstanding *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (TU) and *The Woodlanders*? one may ask. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* however does lead to *Jude the Obscure*:

It was indeed open country, wide and high. . . . About half-way on their journey [Jude and Sue] crossed a main road running due east and west—the old road from London to Land’s End. They paused, and looked up and down it for a moment, and remarked upon the desolation which had come over this once lively thoroughfare,

while the wind dipped to earth,
and scooped straws and hay-
stems from the ground. (131)

Wild animals shun humans and fear their actions, but now they also show their displeasure. While Arabella and Jude are butchering a pig,

[a] robin peered down
at the preparations from the nearest tree,
and, not liking the sinister look of the scene,
flew away, though hungry. (58)

If one lines up Hardy’s published novels and poems in a chronological order, fourteen novels (1871-1895) and over 1001 poems (1898-1928; CP 947 plus fifty-four children’s verses), there is a clear chronological division between the two major genres, but Hardy continued writing prose works after *Jude the Obscure* (six of Hardy’s forty-four short stories were published between 1896 and 1913 and one posthumously in 1929: see “Works Cited”). Poetry, however,

had always been in his mind, and prose and poetry coexisted amicably for many years therein. It seems that Hardy had been thinking all along about the series of poems he had dissolved into hard prose and the hard prose he was perhaps already turning into poems. Few writers have bridged the gap between the two genres as successfully as Hardy, as is exemplified by his lyrical descriptions of nature. The thread I have followed in this study is Hardy's lyricism in his descriptions of nature in both prose and poetry, which I have found equally poetic. Some of Hardy's most lyrical passages dealing with nature, its personification and interaction with human affairs, appear not in rhyming verse but in Hardy's prose, where they find the necessary space and syntactic freedom to develop.

Some critics would see Hardy's moving away from published prose to poetry as an abrupt switch. I find this view difficult to contradict outright, but if one follows a thread throughout the labyrinth, genre differences become a virtue, not of continuity or perfection, but of creative consistency. Some elements all but disappear, others take their place. The word "wind," for instance, so consistently used throughout Hardy's prose, appears in six of the sixteen nature poems ("the winds leap" 273, "the wind skims" 426, "sour winds" 445, "winds footing swift" 699, "waft of wind" 701, "sour spring wind" 825) but it is not once used as a rhyming word in any of them. The wind shares the important orchestral role it plays in nature once: in "On Sturminster Foot-Bridge" "Reticulations creep upon the slack stream's face | When the wind skims irritably past," but it is the current which "clucks smartly into each hollow place" (426). But the wind does appear on the podium briefly in two nature poems: "An Unkindly May"—"The sour spring wind is blurting boisterous-wise | . . . | Plantation timbers creak like rust cranes" (825)—and "Night-Time in Mid-Fall."

Description of nature in "Night-Time in Mid-Fall" (699)

It is a storm-strid night, winds footing swift
 Through the blind profound;
 I know the happenings from their sound;
 Leaves totter down still green, and spin and drift;
 The tree-trunks rock to their roots, which wrench and lift
 The loam where they run onward underground.

The streams are muddy and swollen; eels migrate
 To a new abode;
 Even cross, 'tis said, the turnpike-road.

It is extremely difficult to compress into a poem an entire passage of prose, but the narrator in “Night-Time in Mid-Fall” describes all that is happening from the sounds produced by the leaves tottering down, spinning, and drifting, by the tree trunks rocking to their roots and wrenching and lifting the loam, by the church-timbers cracking, and by the leaves falling “still green” under the strong wind. The poem is a briefer musical piece than the orchestral arrangements of *The Return of the Native* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, to be sure, but it is nonetheless an engaging display of sounds under the direction of Hardy’s favourite maestro.

We have reached the end of the guided tour of *Thomas Hardy’s Descriptions of Nature* without seemingly offering an overall conclusion. But, as in every guided tour of an art gallery, every stop has a conclusion of its own and it is up to each visitor to evaluate and pass judgment on both the tour and the intrinsic value of the exhibits. A few last words, however: there are three different Natures in the Wessex landscapes depicted in Hardy’s numerous canvasses: (1) the unconscious Nature of clouds, mist, mountains, and storms, (2) the spiritual Nature of the harmonies produced by water, vegetation, and wind, and (3) the tangible Nature that Hardy knew and treasured throughout his life. Hardy treats all three Natures with admiration, respect, and care. The overall view one can draw from Hardy’s descriptions of nature is one of verisimilitude, variety, and craftsmanship.

EPILOGUE

Thomas Hardy
1 June 1840–11 January 1928

When a man not contented with the grounds of his success goes on and on,
and tries to achieve the impossible, then he gets profoundly interesting to me.
Life 329.

The comparatively small number of Hardy prose passages quoted in this study show that Hardy's descriptions of nature and natural phenomena have, in addition to some syntactic elements—sequences of short clauses or sentences, rhetorical anaphora, alliteration, assonance, caesura—some of the alerting devices for poetic prose listed by Adam Piette: word-repetition, internal rhyming, prose density, and the presence of motif-terms (Piette 18). These components converge into the numerous rhythm-and-rhyme variations that Hardy instills into his prose descriptions of nature.

These passages serve several textual purposes: brief descriptions inject a touch of lyrical beauty into the passage where they occur; lengthier descriptions usually open a chapter or any other formal division in the text, either as an integral part of the narrator's story or as a segment leading to a crucial moment in the story being told. The descriptions may relate emotionally to the narrative content of the passage where they appear in sympathy with, or in contrast to, the mood of a character, and/or set the stage for what follows them. Although similar emotional situations could happen at completely different times of the day, in the various landscapes of Wessex, or during any of the four seasons of the year, Hardy's descriptions of nature reflect the place, time of day, and season when and where the narrative is taking place, independently of what is happening in the plot at an emotional level. Jean R. Brooks considers that

'Beyond the Last Lamp', 'Tess's Lament', 'Proud Songsters', and 'A Light Snow-fall after Frost' (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*); 'The Pine Planters' and 'In a Wood' (*The Woodlanders*); 'Childhood among the Ferns' and 'Midnight on the Great Western' (*Jude the Obscure*) are fine poems in their own right, because Hardy has added or subtracted features which re-create [the prose passages] in terms of lyric.

“Usually, however,” she concludes, “the prosed poems are more successful in the novels, where they are an organic part of narrative structure and emotional accumulation of detail” (10). But, I suggest, the poems are as successful as the prose passages on their own artistic terms because, to turn around Brooks’ own argument, they “produce the true Hardeian flavour. They crystallize a certain mood or moment of vision which are emotional arias in the novels” (10).

The dominant theme in the prose passages quoted above and in the sixteen poems entered in Appendix 3 is nature itself, of course: i.e., the birds, trees, clouds, drops of rain, insects, stars, waters, winds, and woods that populate Wessex. However, a more important pattern is hidden behind the nature and natural phenomena that Hardy describes in his writing. The thread that can be followed throughout Hardy’s prose-and-poetry tapestry, from *Desperate Remedies* to “An Unkindly May,” is the detailed, caring, and loving manner in which Hardy describes the natural world he experienced, not as a “mere photograph, but purely [as] the product of [his] own mind” (*Life* 153). Hardy’s life-long, caring, and knowledgeable handling of nature, whether with Franciscan love and enjoyment or Darwinian detachment and acceptance, whether in prose or in verse, is exceptional.

“An Unkindly May,” one of Hardy’s most celebrated nature poems, appeared in *Winter Words* in 1928, shortly after its author’s death. Hardy’s second wife wrote:

‘T.H. has been writing almost all the day, revising poems. When he came down to tea he brought one to show me, about a desolate spring morning, and a shepherd counting his sheep and not noticing the weather.’ This is the poem in *Winter Words* called ‘An Unkindly May’. (*Life*, Sunday, 27 November 1927, 444)

But the MS has the year 1877 “added to title before revision” (*CP* 968), suggesting that Hardy wrote this poem probably based on the recollection of a much earlier experience. “I believe it would be said by people who knew me well,” Hardy wrote, “that I have a faculty . . . for burying an emotion in my heart or brain for forty years, and exhuming it at the end of that time as fresh as when interred” (*Life* 378). “An Unkindly May” seems to be one of these disinterments, if not of a recollection per se, certainly of an erased, old note Hardy kept buried in one of his pocket books

(Dalziel, 2009, xxi; 85-86 annotations 6.8 and 6.11; 95 annotation 27.4; and 108-9 annotation 51.2). Could Hardy's statement of 28 September 1877 (the same year added to the title of the poem in the MS) to the effect that an "object or mark raised or made by man on a scene is worth ten times any such formed by unconscious Nature" have any connection with the scene described in "An Unkindly May"? The four lines given to the motionless, silent, concerned shepherd, his white smock-frock, and a gate seem indeed to be worth ten times more than the twelve lines given to restless, noisy, detached Nature.

In the Preface to *Two on a Tower* published in Volume V of the Wessex Novels by Osgood, McIlvaine in 1895, Hardy wrote:

This slightly-built romance was the outcome of a wish to set the emotional history of two infinitesimal lives against the stupendous background of the stellar universe, and to impart to the readers the sentiment that of these contrasting magnitudes the smaller might be the greater to them as men. (3)

It is extraordinary that for a writer for whom the infinitesimal importance of human affairs is far more relevant than the majesty of the universe and the magnificence of nature resulted in such remarkable descriptions of nature as those included in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and the sixteen nature poems Hardy wrote. Moreover, unlike the tragic human affairs Hardy weaves in his writing, the harsh winters and unkindly Mays drawn in his descriptions of nature always carry the hope that they will be followed by sunny summers and colorful autumns, that the snow will melt, the storms will abate, the clouds will dissipate, and the sun will shine again. This ever-present cycle of natural renewal explains why the nature poems and the many passages from Hardy's other writings that describe nature have delighted generations of readers and inspired such caring books as Brown's *Let Me Enjoy the Earth: Thomas Hardy and Nature*.

In 1918, in "Mr Hardy's Lyrical Poems" Edmund Gosse stated:

We should be prepared to find Mr Hardy, with his remarkable aptitude for the perception of natural forms, easily consoled by the influences of landscape and the inanimate world. His range of vision is wide and extremely exact; he has the gift of reproducing before us

scenes of various character with a vividness which is sometimes startling. But Mr Hardy's disdain of sentimentality, and his vigorous analysis of the facts of life, render him insensible not indeed to the mystery nor to the beauty, but to the imagined sympathy of Nature. (34)

In "Yeats or Hardy?" (1983), Richard Hoffpauir brought these gifts into an historical focus: "There is no need here to document Hardy's descriptive precision; it is everywhere in his verse and is the one quality of his art all of his commentators agree on, even, grudgingly, Yeats" (215). An enviable quality, one may emphasise, found everywhere in Hardy's prose.

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APPENDIX 1

Hardy's Poetry under the Critical Lens

The following is a more detailed account of the opinions of six of the renowned specialists on Hardy's poetry mentioned in this thesis: Tim D. Armstrong, Indy Clark, Samuel Hynes, Cecil Day Lewis, Charles Lock, and Dennis Taylor.

In his influential essay "The Lyrical Poetry of Thomas Hardy" (1951), Cecil Day Lewis admits that Hardy had shortcomings as a poet: "fascination of gossip" (156), "shoddiest, reach-me-down verse" (158), and "brooding constantly over the past" (168). However, he praises Hardy's never-quite-extinguished idealism, the wonder of his having written most of his poetry "in old age" (167), his "good sensuous memory" (168), his using "the prosaic to set off and correct the conventionally poetic [and his] "flair for blending the gay and the humorous with the poignant" (169). Lewis considers that three dozen Hardy poems are enough for Hardy to be considered a great poet. Hardy wrote the "best of [the] 1912-13 poems" in honour of his first wife after her death; these poems are, Lewis continues, "some of the finest love poetry in our language: indeed, one may wonder if there is in any language a parallel to this winter-flowering of a poetry of sentiment which had lain dormant in the poet's heart throughout the summer of his age" (170).

In "On Hardy's Badnesses" (1983), on the other hand, Samuel Hynes states:

I do not doubt that Hardy was a great poet, but I also think that he was peculiarly prone to write bad poems [248]. ["My Cicely"] reveals a fundamental lack of humanity. This is essentially a moral judgement of the poem, . . . and I would prefer to keep the moral question in moral terms: indeed, it seems to me necessary to keep in mind that one kind of poetical badness is *moral* badness. But if "My Cicely" is a morally flawed poem, it is also bad in strictly aesthetic terms [251]. [Hardy was an extraordinarily skillful metrist,] there are more than 700 different verse forms among his 900-odd poems, and most of them are handled with great finesse. But sometimes one feels a disjunction between the ostensible subject of the poem and the particular lyrical virtuositities that Hardy has hit upon [253]. Why Hardy, whose novels move so powerfully and symbolically, should

have been unable to do this in his verse I am not sure: it may have to do with the fact that he wrote virtually all of his poems after he had ended his novel-writing career [251]. When Hardy . . . consciously attached himself to the literary high culture of his time and became the Last Victorian, he was a bad poet: not just relatively unsuccessful, but awful. (256)

In “Thomas Hardy and Thomas Gray: The Poet’s Currency” (1998), Dennis Taylor compares Gray’s and Hardy’s approaches to poetry, centring on the influence that Gray (1716-1771) had on Hardy. “Thomas Gray,” states Taylor,

is, of course, only one of a number of influences felt by Hardy in the 1860s, from the perennial influence of Shakespeare’s use of the Horatian “*Exegi Monumentum*” theme to the contemporary influence of Swinburne. But Gray, I would argue, is a key influence because of his unique combination of aestheticism and anxiety about the public culture [451]. A century after Milton, Gray still held to the Latin education of the poet, a model Hardy followed when he moved from his self-taught Latin to his early writing of Sapphics and applied classical meters to English verse. Gray’s carefully historical interest in metrical techniques is the model for Hardy’s own extensive exploration of the stanza forms. Hardy’s metrical development from conservative and classical forms, to increasingly complex and original forms, and on to single irregular stanzas parallels the slighter history of Gray [456]. But there is a major difference between Gray and Hardy as “authors of language.” Gray seeks canonicity, Hardy resists it. Gray seeks the polished formula, Hardy roughens the polish. . . . [There is also] a great difference in grace and idiom. (462)

Whereas Taylor dwells on the influence that Gray exerted upon Hardy’s poetics and anchors Hardy’s verse firmly within the nineteenth-century period of English poetics,⁸ in “Inhibiting the Voice: Thomas Hardy and Modern Poetics” (2009), Charles Lock, commenting on the place that Hardy occupies in the history of English literature, states:

⁸ Taylor’s opinion is shared by Josephine Miles in “Eras in English Poetry:” “[O]n the basis of characteristic modes of sentence structure and on the pattern of their sequence,” Hardy belongs in the last quarter of the 19th century (see pp. 181 and 195). Lock also maintains that Hardy’s verse output is a continuation of his literary career rather than a break from his prose writings, and that the theory “that his novel-writing had been mere journey-work to provide an income, is not credible” (452).

The history of modern English poetry is distorted by delay and deferral. Had “The Wreck of the *Deutschland*” appeared in 1877, and *Wessex Poems* (or, under whatever title, Hardy’s first volume of verse) at about the same time, the impact of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot would appear less abrupt, less unprecedented, less a revolution than a modulation. That *Wessex Poems* appeared in 1898 has meant that Hardy has been neither quite of the nineteenth century nor of the twentieth. (451)

Lock continues:

Hardy’s poetics are those of a novelist, of a particular kind. It was only after he had ceased to write fiction, and had devoted himself for some years exclusively to poetry, that Hardy realized the importance of his fiction, in its own right and as the prologue to, even the prerequisite of, the poetry: as if he had come to acknowledge that there ought to be commerce between them. (453)

From a different perspective, in “Supplementarity: Poetry as the Afterlife of Thomas Hardy” (1988), Tim D. Armstrong argues that, in one sense, we can see Hardy’s poetry as a “ghostly supplement to his public life” (381), that the body of Hardy’s poetry

comprises a corpus different from that of the novelist who can be said to have died: a more subjective and fragmentary art in which he avoids problems of biographical reference, since poetry is supposed to be a lyric essence, all its emotions rendered public [382]. The natural life in Hardy’s late works is irrecoverable, always already denied (as it is for Little Father Time in *Jude the Obscure*, with his deathly text). (392)

Armstrong’s emphasis here is on Hardy’s late poems and his frequent use of imagery depicting dawn, winter, neutral tones, blankness, the inexorable passing of time, aging, and death.

Focusing on a different topic, Indy Clark notes in *Thomas Hardy’s Pastoral: An Unkindly May* that there are “very few critical works on Hardy’s pastoral poetry,” and then proceeds to comment on the critical views of Owen Schur, who considers that the ““principal subject” of the pastoral “is language itself”” in “largely a formalist reading [. . . whose] promising hypothesis is not always convincingly propounded through the examples given” (8-9: Schur 5), and of Dennis Taylor, who “relies on too narrow a view of what is pastoral, reading the 1920s as an idyllic period in Hardy’s writing, revealing him to be ‘a romantic pastoral poet in approximately a score

of poems’.” Clark continues: “‘The story of Hardy’s pastoral poetry before *Human Shows*,’ [Taylor] states boldly, ‘is easy to tell because it is almost non-existent’ [9: Taylor 1989, 139, 145]. . . . Yet, as [Paul] Alpers writes, ‘Almost any type of Hardy poem can be a pastoral, but none need be’” (9; Alpers 304). Clark then proceeds to state his own critical opinion: “Rather than providing a countervailing form, in my discussion of Hardy’s poetry I argue that the georgic is part of the wider pastoral tradition” (10).

An enviable example of a well-thought, well-written article that balances both the positive and negative characteristics of Hardy’s poetry and character is Irving Howe’s “The Short Poems of Thomas Hardy” (1966). Howe states:

The scathing assaults upon untested convictions, the playfulness and deviousness of mind we have come to expect in modern poetry – these are not [in Hardy’s poetry], not . . . at all.

Yet now, again and repeatedly Thomas Hardy is a great poet, a master who lives for us as none of his contemporaries can. He is one of the few indispensable poets in English – . . . what he knows and what he says are fully his, untarnished by vanity or pretence.

Any critic can, and often does, see all that is wrong with Hardy’s poetry, but whatever it is that makes for his strange greatness is much harder to describe. (104-05)

Joseph Brodsky does precisely what Howe states in the last sentence of the above citation. Brodsky sees what in his opinion is all that is wrong with Hardy’s poetry and reports his findings in “Wooing the Inanimate” (1998) and, by doing so, he manages to describe in a rather devious way what it is that makes for Hardy’s strange greatness.

Thomas Hardy is indeed by and large the poet of a very cramped, overstressed line, filled with clashing consonants, yawning vowels; of an extremely crabby syntax and awkward, cumbersome phrasing aggravated by his seemingly indiscriminate vocabulary; of eye/ear/mind-boggling stanzaic designs unprecedented in their never-repeating patterns.

So why push him on us? You may ask. Because all this was deliberate and, in the light of what transpired in the English poetry of the rest of this century, quite prophetic. (367)

This is what enables one to see in a crystal ball unfamiliar multitudes in odd attire making a run on the Scribner’s edition of Hardy’s *Collected Works* or the Penguin *Selected*. (398)

From this selection of works and those cited elsewhere in this thesis, it soon becomes apparent that every niche of the entire spectrum of critical evaluations and points of view on Hardy's poetry, from Eliot's ill-tempered attack to Cecil Maurice Bowra's all-encompassing praise of Hardy's character and poetic output, seems to be occupied.

For other critical points of view consult the following collections: *An Historical Evaluation of Thomas Hardy Poetry* (2000), *A Companion to Thomas Hardy* (2009), and *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy* (2010). Consult, also, Chapter 7 of Gillian Steinberg's *Thomas Hardy: The Poems* (2013).

APPENDIX 2

Hardy's Nature Poems and Other Poems with Substantial Nature Content

Hardy's sixteen nature poems are: from *Satires of Circumstances* (1914), "Before and after Summer" (273), "At Day-Close in November" (274), "The Year's Awakening" (275); from *Moments of Vision* (1917), "Where They Lived" (392), "At Middle-Field Gate in February" (421), "Overlooking the River Stour" (424), "On Sturminster Foot-Bridge" (426), "A Backward Spring" (445), "The Upper Birch-Leaves" (455); from *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), "Growth in May" (583); from *Human Shows* (1925), "Last Week in October" (673), "The Later Autumn" (675), "Night-Time in Mid-Fall" (699), "Snow in the Suburbs" (701); from *Winter Words* (1928), "Proud Songsters" (816), "An Unkindly May" (825).

Like "Afterwards" (511) and "A Spellbound Palace" (688), the following poems are not nature poems: "Domicilium" (1; published in pamphlet form in 1916); from *Wessex Poems* (1898), "Postponement" (7), "The Ivy Wife" (33), "Nature's Questioning" (43); from *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901), "At a Lunar Eclipse" (79), "The Caged Thrush Freed and Home Again" (114), "Birds at Winter Nightfall" (115), "The Puzzled Game-Birds" (116), "Winter in Durnover Field" (117), "The Last Chrysanthemum" (118), "The Darkling Thrush" (119); from *Time's Laughingstocks* (1909), "The Rambler" (221); from *Satires of Circumstance* (1914), "Under the Waterfall" (276); from *Moments of Vision*, "The Five Students" (439), "The Wind's Prophecy" (440), "During Wind and Rain" (441), "It Never Looks Like Summer" (456), "The Robin" (467); from *Late Lyrics*, "Weathers" (512), "A Wet August" (533), "The Fallow Deer at the Lonely House" (551), "After a Romantic Day" (599), "The Master and the Leaves" (618); from *Human Shows*, "A Bird-Scene at a Rural Dwelling" (664), "The Best She Could" (693), "A Light Snow-Fall after Frost" (702), "Shortening Days at the Homestead" (791); from *Winter Words*, "I Watched a Blackbird" (850). Also, the fifty-four children's poems that Hardy contributed anonymously as epigraphs for the prose sections of his second wife, Florence

Dugdale, in *The Book of Baby Beasts* (1911), *The Book of Baby Birds* (1912), and the *Book of Baby Pets* (1915) are not nature poems. Three of the poems included in the children's books—"The Calf" (936), "The Yellow Hammer" (938), and "The Lizard" (942)—appear in *CP* under "Uncollected Poems." All these children's poems are now together in *Fifty-Seven Poems by Thomas Hardy* (2002), edited by Bernard Jones. "The most persuasive evidence for Hardy's authorship," states Jones, "is the humour, liveliness, and imaginative sympathy of the poems themselves, and the lightly invoked technical deftness of their runs of expression, poetic devices and variety of stanza patterns." Millgate considers that

since ["The Calf," "The Yellow Hammer," and "The Lizard"] are so similar in kind and competence to the other fifty-four lively, amusing, sometimes poignant, occasionally casual, but generally skilful poems for children that the [Detmold-Dugdale] volumes contain it is no less reasonable to speculate that Hardy was the author of all of them. (2004, 435)

And Nicola Harris has convincingly argued Hardy's authorship in "Fifty-Seven Poems: Thomas Hardy as Children's Writer" (2007). It follows that "The Caged Thrush Freed and Home Again" (114), "Birds at Winter Nightfall" (115), "The Puzzled Game-Birds" (116), "Winter in Durnover Field" (117), and "The Robin" (467) could be included in this group of children's poems. See, also, Taylor 1989, 146-7.

APPENDIX 3

Hardy's Nature Poems

Before and after Summer (273, 1914)

I

Looking forward to the spring
 One puts up with anything.
 On this February day
 Though the winds leap down the street
 Wintry scourgings seem but play,
 And these later shafts of sleet
 – Sharper pointed than the first –
 And these later snows – the worst –
 Are as a half-transparent blind
 Riddled by rays from sun behind.

II

Shadows of the October pine
 Reach into this room of mine:
 On the pine there swings a bird;
 He is shadowed with the tree.
 Mutely perched he bills no word;
 Blank as I am even is he.
 For those happy suns are past,
 Fore-discerned in winter last.
 When went by their pleasure, then?
 I, alas perceived not when.

At Day-Close in November (274, 1914)

The ten hours' light is abating,
 And a late bird wings across,
 Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
 Give their black heads a toss.
 Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time,
 Float past like specks in the eye;
 I set every tree in my June time,
 And now they obscure the sky.
 And the children who ramble through here
 Conceive that there never has been
 A time when no tall trees grew here,
 That none will in time be seen.

The Year's Awakening (275, 1914)

How do you know that the pilgrim track
 Along the belting zodiac
 Swept by the sun in his seeming rounds
 Is traced by now to the Fishes' bounds
 And into the Ram, when weeks of cloud
 Have wrapt the sky in a clammy shroud,
 And never as yet a tinct of spring
 Has shown in the Earth's apparelling;
 O vespering bird, how do you know,
 How do you know?

How do you know, deep underground,
 Hid in your bed from sight and sound,
 Without a turn in temperature,
 With weather life can scarce endure,
 That light has won a fraction's strength,
 And day put on some moments' length,
 Whereof in merest rote will come,
 Weeks hence, mild airs that do not numb;
 O crocus root, how do you know,
 How do you know?

February 1910

Where They Lived (392, 1917)

Dishevelled leaves creep down
 Upon that bank to-day,
 Some green, some yellow, and some pale brown;
 The wet bents bob and sway;
 The once warm slippery turf is sodden
 Where we laughingly sat or lay.

 The summerhouse is gone,
 Leaving a weedy space;
 The bushes that veiled it once have grown
 Gaunt trees that interlace,
 Through whose lank limbs I see too clearly
 The nakedness of the place.

 And where were hills of blue,
 Blind drifts of vapour blow,
 And the names of former dwellers few,
 If any, people know,
 And instead of a voice that called, 'Come in, Dears,'
 Time calls, 'Pass below!'

At Middle-Field Gate in February (421, 1917)

The bars are thick with drops that show
 As they gather themselves from the fog
 Like silver buttons ranged in a row,
 And as evenly spaced as if measured, although
 They fall at the feeblest jog.

They load the leafless hedge hard by,
 And the blades of last year's grass,
 While the fallow ploughland turned up nigh
 In raw rolls, clammy and clogging lie –
 Too clogging for feet to pass.

How dry it was on a far-back day
 When straws hung the hedge and around,
 When amid the sheaves in amorous play
 In curtained bonnets and light array
 Bloomed a bevy now underground!

Overlooking the River Stour (424, 1917)

The swallows flew in the curves of an eight
 Above the river-gleam
 In the wet June's last beam:
 Like little crossbows animate
 The swallows flew in the curves of an eight
 Above the river-gleam.

Planing up shavings of crystal spray
 A moor-hen darted out
 From the bank thereabout
 And through the stream-shine ripped his way;
 Planing up shavings of crystal spray
 A moor-hen darted out.

Closed were the kingcups; and the mead
 Dripped in monotonous green,
 Though the day's morning sheen
 Had shown it golden and honeybee'd;
 Closed were the kingcups; and the mead
 Dripped in monotonous green.

And never I turned my head, alack,
 While these things met my gaze
 Through the pane's drop-drenched glaze,
 To see the more behind my back. . . .
 O never I turned, but let, alack,
 These less things hold my gaze!

On Sturminster Foot-Bridge (426, 1917)

(Onomatopœic)

Reticulations creep upon the slack stream's face
 When the wind skims irritably past,
 The current clucks smartly into each hollow place
 That years of flood have scabbled in the pier's sodden base;
 The floating-lily leaves rot fast.

On a roof stand the swallows ranged in wistful waiting rows,
 Till they arrow off and drop like stones
 Among the eyot-withies at whose foot the river flows:
 And beneath the roof is she who in the dark world shows
 As a lattice-gleam when midnight moans.

A Backward Spring (445, 1917)

The trees are afraid to put forth buds,
 And there is timidity in the grass;
 The plots lie gray where gouged by spuds,
 And whether next week will pass
 Free of sly sour winds is the fret of each bush
 Of barberry waiting to bloom.

Yet the snowdrop's face betrays no gloom,
 And the primrose pants in its heedless push,
 Though the myrtle asks if it's worth the fight
 This year with frost and rime
 To venture one more time

On delicate leaves and buttons of white
 From the selfsame bough as at last year's prime,
 And never to ruminare on or remember
 What happened to it in mid-December.

April 1917

The Upper Birch-Leaves (455, 1917)

Warm yellowy-green
 In the blue serene,
 How they skip and sway
 On this autumn day!
 They cannot know
 What has happened below, –
 That their boughs down there
 Are already quite bare,
 That their own will be
 When a week has passed, –
 For they jig as in glee
 To this very last.

But no; there lies
 At times in their tune
 A note that cries
 What at first I fear
 I did not hear:
 'O we remember
 At each wind's hollo –
 Though life holds yet –
 We go hence soon,
 For 'tis November;
 – But that *you* follow
 You may forget!'

Growth in May (583, 1922)

I entered a daisy-and-buttercup land,
 And thence thread a jungle of grass:
 Hurdles and stiles scarce visible stand
 Above the lush stems as I pass.
 Hedges peer over, and try to be seen,
 And seem to reveal a dim sense
 That amid such ambitious and elbow-high green
 They make a mean show as a fence.
 Elsewhere the mead is possessed of the neats,
 That range not greatly above
 The rich rank thicket which brushes their teats,
 And *her* gown, as she waits for her Love.

Last Week in October (673, 1925)

The trees are undressing, and fling in many places –
 On the gray road, the roof, the window-sill –
 Their radiant robes and ribbons and yellow laces;
 A leaf each second so is flung at will,
 Here, there, another and another, still and still.
 A spider's web has caught one while downcoming,
 That stays there dangling when the rest pass on;
 Like a suspended criminal hangs he, mumming
 In golden garb, while one yet green, high yon,
 Trembles, as fearing such a fate for himself anon.

The Later Autumn (675, 1925)

Gone are the lovers, under the bush
 Stretched at their ease;
 Gone the bees,
 Tangling themselves in your hair as they rush

On the line of your track,
 Leg-laden, back
 With a dip to their hive
 In a prepossessed dive.

Toadsmeat is mangy, frosted, and sere;
 Apples in grass
 Crunch as we pass,
 And rot ere the men who make cyder appear.
 Couch-fires abound
 On fallows around,
 And shades far extend
 Like lives soon to end.

Spinning leaves join the remains shrunk and brown
 Of last year's display
 That lie wasting away,
 On whose corpses they earlier as scorners gazed down
 From their aery green height:
 Now in the same plight
 They huddle; while yon
 A robin looks on.

Night-Time in Mid-Fall (699, 1925)

It is a storm-strid night, winds footing swift
 Through the blind profound;
 I know the happenings from their sound;
 Leaves totter down still green, and spin and drift;
 The tree-trunks rock to their roots, which wrench and lift
 The loam where they run onward underground.
 The streams are muddy and swollen; eels migrate
 To a new abode;
 Even cross, 'tis said, the turnpike-road;
 (Men's feet have felt their crawl, home-coming late):
 The westward fronts of towers are saturate,
 Church-timbers crack, and witches ride abroad.

Snow in the Suburbs (701, 1925)

Every branch big with it,
 Bent every twig with it;
 Every fork like a white web-foot;
 Every street and pavement mute:
 Some flakes have lost their way, and grope back upward, when
 Meeting those meandering down they turn and descend again.
 The palings are glued together like a wall,
 And there is no waft of wind with the fleecy fall.
 A sparrow enters the tree,
 Whereon immediately

A snow-lump thrice his own slight size
 Descends on him and showers his head and eyes,
 And overturns him,
 And near inurns him,
 And lights on a nether twig, when its brush
 Starts off a volley of other lodging lumps with a rush.

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

Proud Songsters (816, 1928)

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

 These are brand-new birds of twelve-months' growing,
 Which a year ago, or less that twain,
 No finches were, nor nightingales,
 Nor thrushes,
 But only particles of grain,
 And earth, and air, and rain.

An Unkindly May (825, 1928)

A shepherd stands by a gate in a white smock-frock:
 He holds the gate ajar, intently counting his flock.

 The sour spring wind is blurting boisterous-wise,
 And bears on it dirty clouds across the skies;
 Plantation timbers creak like rusty cranes,
 And pigeons and rooks, dishevelled by late rains,
 Are like gaunt vultures, sodden and unkempt,
 And song-birds do not end what they attempt:
 The buds have tried to open, but quite failing
 Have pinched themselves together in their quailing.
 The sun frowns whitely in eye-trying flaps
 Through passing cloud-holes, mimicking audible taps.
 'Nature, you're not commendable to-day!'
 I think. 'Better to-morrow!' she seems to say.

 That shepherd still stands in that white smock-frock,
 Unnoting all things save the counting his flock.

APPENDIX 4

The Storm

CHAPTER XXXVII

The Storm: The Two Together

A light flapped over the scene, as if reflected from phosphorescent wings crossing the sky, and a rumble filled the air. It was the first move of the approaching storm. The second peal was noisy, with comparatively little visible lightning. . . . Then there came a third flash. . . . The lightning now was the colour of silver and gleamed in the heavens. . . . Rumbles became rattles. . . . Then the picture vanished, leaving [intense] darkness. . . . A blue light appeared in the zenith. . . . It was the fourth of the larger flashes. A moment later and there was a smack—smart, clear, and short. . . . [O]ut leapt the fifth flash with . . . [a] shout. . . . It was green as an emerald, and the reverberation was stunning. . . . “It is not very dark when the lightning has been gone a bit.” . . . The rick suddenly brightened with the brazen glare of shining majolica. . . . It had been the sixth flash, which had come from the east. . . . Then came the peal. It hardly was credible that such a heavenly light could be the parent of such a diabolical sound. . . . [T]here was more light . . . thrown across by a secondary flash in the west. The next flash came . . . thunder and all. . . . There was then a silence everywhere for four or five minutes. . . . But there came a burst of light. . . . The flash was almost too novel. . . . It sprang from east, west, north, south . . . [with] intertwined undulating snakes of green, and behind these was a broad mass of lesser light. Simultaneously came from every part of the tumbling sky . . . a shout. . . . [A] tall tree . . . seemed on fire to a white heat, and a new one among these terrible voices mingled with the last crash of those preceding. It was a stupefying blast, harsh and pitiless, and it fell . . . in a dead, flat blow, without that reverberation which lends the tones of a drum to more distant thunder. . . . A sulphurous smell filled the air: then all was silent, and black as a cave. . . . The darkness was now impenetrable. . . . [Then the sky was] filled with an incessant light, frequent repetition melting into complete continuity as an unbroken sound results from the successive strokes on a gong.

“Nothing serious,” said [Gabriel to Bathsheba]. “I cannot understand no rain falling. But Heaven be praised, it is all the better for us.” (*FMC* 244-7; my adaptation)